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ABSTRACT

This report documents the methodology and findings of a study of the characteristics of Illinois public school district 31's reading programs in kindergarten through grade 8. For the study's purposes, the term "reading program" includes integrated language arts and humanities instruction. The study was conducted in response to a request from District 31 to investigate why the reading test scores of students were lower than expected, and did not necessarily match teachers' perceptions of students' reading ability. Related to this issue is the extent to which there is alignment among reading assessments, the district's curriculum, and reading instruction. The North Central Regional Educational Lab (NCREL) proposed a study sufficiently wide in scope to develop and support recommendations regarding strengths and weaknesses in District 31's reading program. The report contains information on the background of the study, its design and methodology (development of data collection instruments, data collection, and synthesizing, analyzing, and reporting data), findings (synthesizes data gathered through site visits and analysis of the teacher questionnaire and interview as well as the artifacts collected), and conclusions and recommendations (interprets key findings, suggests areas where additional study is needed, and presents recommendations for District 31 schools). Appended are data collection instruments (focus group questions, individual teacher interviews, a teacher/staff questionnaire, and the observation protocol). (Contains 11 notes, 15 tables, 10 figures, and 100 references.) (NKA)

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A Study of Reading Practices, Instruction, and Achievement in District 31 Schools

Prepared by

Mary Foertsch
North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
Oak Brook, Illinois

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Project Staff

Study Team

Mary A. Foertsch
Evaluation and Policy Information Center
Center for Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum

Margaret Tinzmann
Center for Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum

Mary Anderson
Center for Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum

Curriculum Consultation

Connie Bridge
North Central College

Data Analysis Team

Arie van der Ploeg
Evaluation and Policy Information Center

Roger Chesswas
Evaluation and Policy Information Center

Mike Pajor
Research Partnerships

Document Preparation

Liz Cornell
Evaluation and Policy Information Center

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Introduction

This report documents the methodology and findings of a study of the characteristics of District 31's reading programs in kindergarten through grade 8. For the purposes of this study, the term "reading program" includes integrated language arts and humanities instruction.

This study was conducted in response to a request from District 31 to investigate why the reading test scores of students were lower than expected, and did not necessarily match teachers' perceptions of students' reading ability. Related to this issue is the extent to which there is alignment among reading assessments, the district's curriculum, and reading instruction.

NCREL proposed a study that would be sufficiently wide in scope to develop and support recommendations regarding strengths and weaknesses in District 31's reading program. We designed the study to identify and describe the characteristics of the current reading programs that either enhance or create obstacles to implementing effective reading instruction at the elementary and middle school levels.

Design of the Study

Based on the needs of teachers, administrators, and students in this district, we designed a study that would

- Analyze the quality and level of implementation of District 31's reading/language arts program at the elementary, middle school, and junior high levels, and synthesize research with a thorough analysis of reading programs using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

- Provide a useful, timely written document containing information that can be used formatively by District 31 as a tool for discussion and planning. This document will include considerations for (a) reading program development, and (b) alternative reading assessments.

- Include an evaluation of the alignment of reading assessments with district curriculum.

We conducted the study in three phases:

Phase I: Development of Data Collection Instruments. The following data collection instruments were developed for this study.

- *Teacher/Staff Focus Group Discussion Protocol*
- *Individual Teacher Interview*
- *Observation Protocol*
- *Teacher Questionnaire*

Phase II: Data Collection. We conducted one classroom observation with each reading/language arts teacher at the non-IGAP grades, and two classroom observations at the IGAP grades (3, 6, and 8). In addition, teachers and other school staff were interviewed individually and in groups, a questionnaire was administered, and artifacts were collected. We also investigated the extent to which the curricula reflect the state standards, and the consistency of student performance on the IGAP and CTBS across years.

Phase III: Synthesizing, Analyzing, and Reporting Data. We distilled information about the district's reading programs from interviews, questionnaire responses, artifact collections; and wrote the report, providing conclusions and recommendations.

By gathering descriptive data from the individual and group interviews, artifact collections, the questionnaire, and classroom observations, our methodology provided us with both qualitative and quantitative information about the characteristics of District 31's reading programs. We synthesized the data within two broad contexts: reading practices and student achievement.

Rather than focusing on the IGAP grades exclusively, we choose to look at reading instruction and practices across grade levels because policies affecting reading programs are usually implemented school-wide. We also recognized that student performance on the state-mandated test is the result of the cumulative effect of years of effective teaching and learning.

Organization of the Report

The rest of this report is structured as follows:

- **Background of the Study:** Summarizes the findings of related reading research that influenced the research questions for this study.
- **Design and Methodology:** Describes the research methods including the research team, the development of data collection instruments for the site visits, the teacher survey, and the procedures for gathering and analyzing the data.
- **Findings:** Reports a synthesis of data gathered through site visits and an analysis of the teacher questionnaire and interview as well as the artifacts collected.
- **Conclusions and Recommendations:** Interprets the key findings, suggests areas where additional study is needed, and presents recommendations for District 31 schools.

Background of the Study

Overview

Our review of the literature focused on several key areas: Different views about how reading should be defined and the best way to teach reading, factors that influence reading achievement, and effective instructional strategies. As we designed this study, we tried to balance the purpose of the study, which is to identify the characteristics of District 31's reading/language arts programs and their impact on teaching and learning, with the extensive information available about the issues related to best practices in reading. We recognize that the teaching of reading is context-specific and shaped by a range of factors, such as instructional approaches, teachers' beliefs about how children learn to read, environments that support and sustain the process of learning, and the IGAP (Illinois Goals Assessment Program). The following review of the literature is divided into these major areas.

Different Definitions of Reading

The best way to teach reading continues to be debated, partly because of concern over students' low achievement in reading (NAEP, 1996), but also because of fundamental disagreements about what is meant by the term "reading." Weaver (1994) has identified three conflicting definitions of learning to read:

> **Definition 1**: Learning to read means learning to pronounce words.
> **Definition 2**: Learning to read means learning to identify words and get their meaning.
> **Definition 3**: Learning to read means learning to bring meaning to a text in order to get meaning from it (Weaver, 1994, p. 15).

While each of these definitions appears to be completely different, in reality, they collectively represent a complete view of reading. Research supports the idea that a complete definition of reading must include both decoding and the construction of meaning (Anderson, Hiebert, Wilkenson & Scott, 1989), although the current reading wars have often artificially and unnecessarily separated these two essential components of the reading process.

What research tells us about the reading process is that sounding out words is necessary but not sufficient to the task; the reading process is really meaning driven. It is important to understand that unlocking the code and reading words is only a part of the complex process of reading (Adams, 1990). Recently, the International Reading Association (IRA) published a position statement, *The Role of Phonics in Reading Instruction* (1997) to clarify the role of phonics in learning to read. The IRA affirms that phonics is an essential aspect of beginning reading instruction, one that should be valued and taught. However, they go on to caution about inaccurate claims and distortions concerning the role of phonics in beginning reading. In essence, the IRA stated that simplistic solutions like more phonics instruction for students who

are experiencing difficulty reading are misguided. The problems faced by educators in helping all children to become readers are too complex for simple solutions. What is needed to ensure that all children acquire reading and writing proficiency is a balanced instructional approach that incorporates the strengths of different classroom literacy approaches--from phonics to trade books--and applies what is known about how children learn to be literate (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Foertsch, 1997).

Definition 1: Learning to Read Means Learning to Pronounce Words

Phonemic awareness is the ability to segment, delete, and combine speech sounds into abstract units. While students will be able to hear phonemes, they may not be able to conceptualize them as units. This concept is even more complex than this description would suggest. Phonemic awareness must be based upon a growing understanding of the alphabetic principle of English; there is sufficient evidence that many children basically understand this before they have mastered the set of letter to sound correspondences (Adams, 1990).

The research of the last decade emphasizes the significant role played by phonemic awareness in the development of the ability to decode and to read for meaning (Adams 1990; Juel, 1988, 1991). The weight of research evidence suggests that phonemic awareness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of decoding and reading. Allington (1998) notes that while there is a convergence of evidence emphasizing the importance of phonemic awareness in learning to read an alphabetic language, the evidence also indicates that most children (80 to 85 percent) acquire this awareness by the middle of first grade as a result of typical experiences at home and at school. Juel and Adams have documented the success of teaching phonemic awareness directly; however, they also find that it is highly likely to develop as a consequence of learning phonics, learning to read, and learning to write, especially when teachers encourage students to use invented spellings. Context appears to be critical to the efficacy of phonemic awareness as a predictor of success; the impact of increased performance in isolated phonemic awareness tasks on tests of reading comprehension is considerably less (Tumner, Herriman, & Nesdale, 1988).

Foorman (1995) has conducted a series of studies that examine how children with training in phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge fare in comparison to children receiving "whole language" instruction. Preliminary findings indicate a positive impact on decoding of training in phonemic awareness. However, children in "whole language" classrooms fare better on comprehension tests.

The importance of the early development of phonemic awareness is evident throughout the research literature (Carnine & Grossen, 1993; Juel, 1991; Pearson, 1993; Stanovich, 1991). Currently, the debate has come to focus primarily on the place of phonemic awareness [1] in early

[1] Phonemic Awareness refers to the ability to discern that spoken language is composed of separate speech sounds; the ability to segment the speech stream of a spoken word.

reading instruction. A number of studies point to phonemic awareness as a predictor of early reading success; however, it is also clear that it is but one factor important to the development of effective reading strategies.

Definition 2: Learning to Read Means Learning to Identify Words and Get Their Meaning

Phonics includes the teaching of particular parts of language, specifically, the rules for phoneme-grapheme relationships in reading. A basic knowledge of letter-sound relationships, or phonics, is a necessary, but not sufficient, strategy used by successful readers. Fundamental questions remain about how much, how, when, and under what circumstances knowledge of phonics should be included in instruction.

The International Reading Association (IRA, 1997) has asserted three basic principles regarding phonics and the teaching of reading:

1. The teaching of phonics is an important aspect of beginning reading instruction.
2. Classroom teachers in the primary grades should value and teach phonics as a part of their reading program (teachers make appropriate instructional decisions for the inclusion of phonics based on their knowledge of children and their language development).
3. Effective phonics instruction must be embedded in the context of a total reading/language arts program. Phonics instruction is meaningful to the extent that it is presented within the contexts of language use that provide patterns and structures to support students' understandings.

Research studies concerning phonics instruction fall into two broad categories: those studies that assert the importance of phonics instruction in learning to read, and those that show phonics instruction as but one of many factors in learning to read. Jeanne Chall's (1967, 1983) work, which has focused on the importance of phonics in reading instruction, suggests that systematic phonics instruction is a valuable component of beginning reading instruction within the complementary context of connected and meaningful reading. However, Chall's findings of a positive correlation between systematic phonics and higher scores on tests of reading and spelling achievement only hold true through the primary grades; beyond grade 4, the correlation ceases (Purcell-Gates, McIntrye, & Freppon, 1995; Shannon, 1996).

Marilyn Adams' (1990) thorough review of research concludes that instruction in phonics is a critical factor for success in early reading. However, those who view reading as a construction of meaning find this perspective to be missing particularly in regard to the sociocultural contexts of literacy (Weaver, 1998). In *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985), Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson state that "Phonics instruction should aim to teach only the most important and regular of letter-to-sound relationships....once the basic relationships have been taught, the best way to get children to refine and extend their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences is thorough repeated opportunities to read (p. 38).

Early research that highlights phonics instruction as one of many factors in learning to read include Bond and Dykstra's (1967) Cooperative Research Program in Primary Reading Instruction. Also known as the First Grade Studies, Bond and Dykstra's research showed that no one approach is so much better in all situations that it should be considered the best method. They also found that no matter what the program, the quality of teaching makes the difference in instruction.

Another early series of studies, the Follow Through Studies (Stebbins, St. Pierre, Proper, Anderson, & Cerva, 1977), focused on a wide variety of models, ranging from isolated phonics instruction to whole language approaches. No one model proved to be more effective than others on conceptual measures. Advocates for a strong systematic phonics approach continue to find data in regard to one of the sites as consistently showing the best reading achievement[2]. The validity of these results, however, continues to be debated.

Phonics can be taught through a wide variety of methods: intensive, explicit, synthetic, analytic, and embedded. However, all phonics instruction focuses on the learner's attention to the relationships between sounds and symbols as an important strategy for word recognition. While some students require explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, the development of phonemic awareness in emergent readers is supported by games that emphasize rhyming, and thinking about the structure of words; opportunities to help children notice and use letters and words (Adams, 1990; Cunningham, 1990; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996); invented spelling; language experience; reading for meaning; experiences with language, environmental print, and patterned stories (Adams, 1990; Juel, 1991; Pearson, 1993).

Weaver, Gillmeister-Krause, and Vento-Zogby (1996) see four major areas of agreement about the teaching of phonics reflected in the research literature:

- Children benefit from some explicit, direct help in developing phonemic awareness and a functional command of phonics.
- Direct teaching of phonics does not need to be intensive to be effective.
- Worksheets and rote drills are not the best means for developing phonics knowledge
- Phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge for some students develops as a result of reading and writing whole texts.

The consensus among researchers in the field seems to be that a balance of activities designed to improve word recognition, including phonics instruction and reading meaningful text, is necessary for creating effective beginning reading instruction. No one teaching method meets the needs of every child (Freppon & Dahl, 1991). However, teaching phonics knowledge in context

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[2] The site mentioned in this study used the Distar program, that is based on a highly structured and highly focused systematic teaching of the alphabet.

and through discussion and collaborative activities seems to be more effective with more children than other means.

Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. The research on the role of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction points to the need for more direct, systematic, explicit teaching of this aspect of the reading process for some beginning readers (e.g., Delpit, 1986, 1988). However, there are equally substantive studies that point to the increased benefit of contextualized literacy experiences (e.g., storybook reading) to struggling readers (Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995). Research also shows that by fourth grade, the relationship between phonics knowledge and successful reading no longer shows a strong correlation (Chall, 1983).

Definition 3: Learning to Read Means Learning to Bring Meaning to a Text in Order to Get Meaning From It

The Whole Language approach is a meaning-centered approach to reading instruction. This approach is based on the following principles:

- people learn best when actively involved in learning,
- children will not all learn the same things, much less learn them at the same time, no matter how we teach;
- and educational assessment of learning should both focus on and promote continued learning.

Advocates of the Whole Language approach believed that children learn to read and write by being supported in actually reading and writing whole texts. In whole language classrooms, children with less developed reading and writing skills are not consigned to do isolated skills work. They still engage in authentic reading and writing, though using less sophisticated texts and with more support. They are given help developing needed skills and strategies in the context of reading and writing meaningful, interesting texts (Altwerger, 1991; Goodman, 1989, Y. Goodman, 1989; Newman & Church, 1990; Watson, 1989; Weaver, 1990).

One popular misconception about whole language is that whole language teachers do not teach phonics. However, phonics has always been at the heart of whole language, acknowledged and taught as one of the three major language cueing systems (i.e., semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic) that must be orchestrated as one reads (Mills, O'Keefe, & Stephens, 1992; Powell & Hornsby, 1993; Wagstaff, 1994).

Toward a Consensus on the Teaching of Reading

It is possible to draw a number of sound conclusions based on research concerning the reading process, the development of phonemic awareness and word reading skills, and classroom research on the development of literacy:

1. Beginning and less proficient readers use context to help them identify many words. Proficient and experienced readers, however, typically read many words automatically and easily, which can facilitate the processing of text for meaning (e.g., Watson, 1989; Weaver, 1990).

2. Learning to read includes developing strategies for making sense of text as well as developing letter/sound knowledge, and using both together, effectively and efficiently (Weaver, 1997).

3. Knowledge of whole words, phonemic awareness, and letter/sound correspondences all seem to facilitate each other. They are also all good predictors of decoding (e.g., Weaver, 1997).

4. Decoding skills give approximate pronunciations for many unknown print words. Readers must also use their prior knowledge of words to get the actual word (e.g., Powell & Horsby, 1993).

5. Context alone is inadequate for getting the exact meaning of a word, or sometimes even the general meaning. Proficient readers use multiple strategies to understand words and meaning from texts—not just prior knowledge and context, and not just letter/sound knowledge, but everything together (e.g., Mills,O'Keefe, & Stephens,1992; McIntyre & Pressley, 1996).

6. Phonemic awareness and learning to read facilitate one another. That is, being able to segment words into phonemes helps in learning to read and write, while reading and rereading familiar texts and writing with invented spellings reinforce and promote the development of phonemic awareness. This suggests that phonics should be taught in conjunction with and through reading and writing. This also suggests that we should not neglect phonics and phonemic awareness instruction (e.g., Allington & Cunningham, 1996).

7. Phonemic awareness is clearly related to decoding skill in particular, but research is divided as to the direction of that influence. Some research suggests that phonemic awareness is prerequisite to decoding, while other research suggests that decoding words in chunks is a precursor to phonemic awareness. It is likely the case that each facilitates the other (e.g., Weaver, 1997).

8. Some evidence indicates that children may get off to a better start at decoding (using phonics knowledge) if given explicit instruction in phonemic awareness than children with more of an initial emphasis on comprehension. However, there is also evidence to suggest that children in classrooms that emphasize reading and writing, with phonics taught in context, get off to just as good a start with phonics as children in phonics intensive classrooms.

9. Reading difficulties are not traceable to just one source. For example, they may be traceable to difficulty with phonological/orthographic processing (using "phonics" knowledge), to

trying to read words with little regard for making sense of the text, to difficulty in drawing inferences, etc. Difficulty with phonological processing is said to be the most common cause of reading difficulties (Stanovich, 1988; Lyon, 1995; Boder, 1973), but that is not necessarily true if reading is defined in terms of comprehension rather than word identification.

As Weaver (1996) has stated, it is important to understand that there is a balance in reading instruction, and a very delicate one, between not doing enough to help children learn to draw upon phonics knowledge to recognize familiar and unfamiliar print words, and emphasizing phonics too much. She also asserts that there is a delicate instructional balance that varies from child to child, and that teachers need to be flexible in terms of how they teach. Teachers need guidance not merely in teaching phonics and phonemic awareness, but in teaching reading strategies and the use of phonics skills within those strategies. Teachers need guidance in helping children develop background knowledge and concepts in learning to process texts for meaning. Equally important, they need guidance in learning to analyze their students' strengths and needs as readers (Wiggins, 1989).

Factors that Influence Learning to Read

A number of factors have been found to influence learning to read, including cultural factors, as well as factors associated with ESL/bilingual education, and the instruction of children with special needs.

Cultural Expectations. The match between cultural expectations for literacy and school expectations for literacy is crucial to the successful acquisition of reading. Children's experiences with literacy vary from culture to culture. For example, in some cultures storytelling is highly valued over the use of print materials (Morrow, 1996). Research studies indicate that the types and forms of literacy practiced in some homes—often of low income, ethnic and cultural minority, and immigrant families—are largely incongruent with the literacy encountered in school (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Forsey-Gaines, 1988). This research identifies families as literate in ways defined by their culture and community. These studies challenge assumptions about uniform definitions of literacy as well as about the concern of parents for their children's education (e.g., Chavkin, 1989; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991).

Since oral language provides the foundation for written language acquisition, a mismatch can cause a lack of success in learning to read in school. With increasing diversity among the population, children come to school with a wide variety of experiences with print (Hall, 1987). As student populations become more diverse, it becomes increasingly important that teachers be attentive to the cultural framework from which children operate, building upon their experiences, values, and background knowledge to introduce them to more public forms of literacy.

It is critical to support positive connections between the home culture and school. Erickson (1993), and Erickson and Mohatt (1982) describe the importance of "culturally responsive

instruction" as a way of providing for success for minority students. They suggest teachers use communication patterns responsive to or compatible with the norms, beliefs, and values of students' home cultures. Similarly, Gay (1988) reports that it is the variety of interests, aptitudes, motivations, experiences, and cultural conditioning that determine how, not whether, students can or cannot learn. Gay suggests that the primary issue is for the school to provide what the child needs now, not to explain away failure as the home's fault.

Research concerning the development of positive relationships among culture, language, and schooling include Au and Mason's (1981, 1983) work with the Kamehameha School (KEEP) to construct a curriculum that was attentive to the native language structures of Hawaiian children. Their research shows the importance of a match between native language and dominant language as key to moving children into successful literacy experiences.

Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) study of six inner-city families showed a great number and variety of early literacy experiences displayed within their everyday lives, but a mismatch between school expectations and the cultural expectations and interpretations of the family. While there were many rich reading and writing experiences available to the children in their homes, school provided mainly workbook and drill-oriented experiences. This study points out the danger in global generalizations about the literacy needs of low socioeconomic status cultural and ethnic minority students.

Wells' (1986) longitudinal study of preschool children in London found a critical relationship between reading aloud to children and their success as readers at school. The amount of storybook reading children experienced prior to beginning school was the single strongest factor in determining their success in school.

Native language. The ways in which children communicate in their home cultures are critical to the development of written language models of reading and writing. The home language of students provides the foundation for the emergence of reading and writing behaviors. If there is a mismatch between the structures, values, and expectations of the home language and school language, children may be at a disadvantage for success in early reading tasks, and thus spend their entire school careers attempting to catch up (Gay, 1988; Snow, 1992).

As long as the number of families immigrating to the United States continues to grow, many children will be entering school with a language other than English. Snow (1992) suggests that literacy be defined in light of language variety. That is, literacy should be defined in terms of what it takes to function in one's culture on a daily basis rather than solely upon an indefinable standard language. Thus, literacy is much more than simply being able to read and write; it is, rather, a set of complex tasks and behaviors that may, for some individuals, encompass the use of several languages and literacies. Given this definition of literacy, learning to read in the language that encompasses those things familiar and meaningful, is critical to success in learning to read in a second language.

Research shows that language minority students face many challenges in school. For example, they are 1.5 times more likely to drop out of school than native speakers (Cardenas, Robledo, & Waggoner, 1988). English-language learners also receive lower grades, are judged by their teachers to have lower academic abilities, and score below their classmates on standardized tests of reading and math (Moss & Puma, 1995);

The best way to assist students as they learn English as their second language continues to be hotly debated. Collier (1995) asserts it is a mistake to believe that the first thing students must learn is English, thus isolating the language from a broad complex of other issues. Much of the debate rests exactly here: Should students know English before they are allowed to join their peers in classrooms?

Both cognitive and academic development in the first language have been found to have positive effects on second language learning (Bialystock, 1991; Collier, 1989, 1992; Garcia, 1994; Genessee, 1987, 1994; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Academic skills, literacy development, concept formation, subject knowledge, and strategy development learned in the first language transfer to the second language. However, because literacy is socially situated, it is equally critical to provide a supportive school environment that allows the academic and cognitive development in the first language to flourish.

Research strongly supports the idea that native language use is advantageous in English language acquisition (August & Hakuta,1997; Cuevas, 1997). This use is defined within a range from commitment to a bilingual program to programs where almost all instruction takes place in English, and the native language is used to clarify and extend students' understanding. The second language student makes sense of the second language by using many of the same strategies that worked so well in acquiring the first language. What is different, however, is that the second language student already has an understanding of the meanings, uses, and purposes, of language; he must now go on to learn how the second language--oral and in print---expresses those purposes, uses, and meanings (Lindfors, 1987).

It is important to understand the consequences of various program designs for students learning English. In U.S. schools where all instruction is given through the second language (i.e., English), non-native speakers with no schooling in their first language take seven to ten years to reach age- and grade-level norms (Cummins, 1981). Immigrant students who have had two to three years of schooling in their first language (in their home countries) take at least five to seven years to reach age and grade level norms (Cummins, 1981). Non-native speakers schooled in a second language for part or all of the day typically do reasonably well in early years; however, from fourth grade, when academic and cognitive demands of the curriculum increase rapidly, students with little or no academic and cognitive development in their first language fail to maintain positive gains (Collier, 1995). Students who have spent four to seven years in a quality bilingual program sustain academic achievement and outperform monolingually schooled students in the upper grades.

Environments filled with print examples in both languages are important to successful acquisition (Hudelson, 1987). For example, children's literature in both languages should be in classroom and school libraries for children to access at both school and home; newspapers and other examples of community literacy should be available in both languages at home and at school; signage in classrooms should be in both languages as appropriate. It is also important that a variety of opportunities to read and write in both languages be available in the classroom (Janopoulous, 1986; Moll, 1992).

Learning to read and write in the first language supports success with reading and writing in the second language (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cuevas, 1997; Roberts, 1994). Also, literacy skills related to decoding tasks of reading have been found to transfer between languages (Bialystock, 1997; Goodman, Goodman, Fores, 1979; Hudelson, 1987, Mace-Matluck, 1982). However, these skills must be contextualized within meaningful instructional contexts for full transfer to occur. English vocabulary is a primary determinant of reading comprehension for second language readers. Those students whose first language has many cognates with English have an advantage in English vocabulary recognition, but often require explicit instruction to optimize transfer for comprehension (Garcia & Nagy, 1993). Clearly, it is important for educators to find a potential for reciprocity between the two languages.

Many studies support a balanced literacy program as appropriate for students whose first language is not English, that is, programs that provide a balance of explicit instruction and student-directed activities that incorporate aspects of both traditional and meaning-based curricula (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991; Goldenberg & Sullivan, 1994; Moll, 1988). However, there is no one best way to teach English language learners; different approaches are necessary because of the great diversity of conditions faced by schools and the varying experiences of English learners with literacy and schooling in their first language (August & Hakuta, 1997).

Knapp & Shields (1990) caution that instruction for cultural, ethnic, and linguistic minority students that is primarily skill-based may limit children's learning by failing to develop their analytical or conceptual skills or by failing to provide purposes for learning. Research suggests that instructional methods for teaching reading to these children should focus on meaning construction (Au, 1993; O'Donnell & Wood, 1992), language development (Heath, Mangiola, Schecter, & Hall, 1991; Ovando, 1993; Tharp, 1989), and higher order thinking skills, including metacognition and prior knowledge (Chamot, 1993; Crawford, 1993; Cummins, 1986; Pogrow, 1992). Both Delpit (1988) and Gay (1988) advocate a "balanced" curriculum for minority students that provides explicit and flexible instruction in English within a meaningful context.

Students with Special Needs. There are many different kinds of programs for students with special needs. For some students, an Individual Education Program (IEP) might result in participation in a Title I program; for others, their needs may dictate a Special Education program which is warranted when there are handicapping conditions, the most common being Learning Disabled (LD) or Reading Disabled (RD). Spear-Swerling & Sternberg (1996) contend

that there is currently no educational basis for differentiating school-labeled children with Reading Disability (RD) from other kinds of poor readers.

Historically, educational definitions of reading disability contain three central elements: (1) the notion that children with RD are achieving well below their true potential for learning; (2) the assumption that RD is due to an intrinsic deficit (sometimes described in psychological terms as a "disorder in processing" but assumed to have a biological cause); and (3) exclusionary criteria, which rule out other disorders (e.g., mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or sensory impairment) and the environment as the primary causes of RD (Spear-Sweling & Sternberg, 1996). There are research findings to support almost any position one wishes to take. However, there is agreement that mildly handicapped special education students receive significantly less reading instruction than remedial students (Haynes & Jenkins, 1986; Vanecko, Ames, & Archambault, 1980), and there is evidence that both groups actually receive less reading instruction than better readers (Allington & Walmsley, 1995).

Do struggling readers (particularly those with disabilities) need qualitatively different instruction? Some educators argue that these students need frequent, intensive, explicit, and individual support and direction from teachers (Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1996), but within meaningful experiences that are similar to those offered to other students in the classroom. Others argue for specific types of instruction that focus upon the specific needs of such readers as different from other students in the classroom, usually within the range of phonological skills that are taught in a meaningful context (Spear-Swerling & Stermberg, 1996). Still others think that to focus on decoding is the most appropriate type of instruction for struggling readers (Carnine & Grossen, 1993; Grossen & Carnine, 1990; Juel, 1994).

While there is no one best method that can be identified, nor is there consensus on one definition of a struggling reader, teachers must be aware of a child's background (social, economic, and cultural) and individual needs (e.g., learning style). The following factors are critical to providing supportive environments for all readers (Foertsch, 1997), but particularly struggling readers:

- Access and opportunity to read a wide variety of materials
- Motivation to want to read and to want to engage in reading.
- Providing time to read in real texts.
- Supportive instruction in the "how-tos" of reading.
- Self-esteem and confidence, which play integral roles in successful reading development.
- High expectations for success in supported environments.

A review of the programs designed for children who struggle with learning to read reflect these factors. Reading Recovery (Clay, 1972; Deford, Lyons, & Pinnell, 1991) is a program that focuses on short-term (usually less than one year), intensive, one-to-one intervention with children who struggle very early on (usually in first grade) and which occurs in addition to regular classroom experiences. Roller (1996) suggests a workshop model where children choose from a wide variety of reading materials, participate in literature discussion groups and carry out

personal writing projects in the classroom paired with one-to-one and small-group instruction during other times of the day. While the organizational structures of these programs differ, and they encompass many different types of instructional approaches, all of these designs focus upon meaningful language experiences.

Core Understandings

Students at the elementary and middle school levels need a wide variety of experiences with texts to gain sophistication in reading. In addition, teachers need to employ a wide variety of teaching strategies to provide the appropriate scaffolds for individual learners. Effective reading instruction depends on the teacher's knowledge of current best practice in literacy instruction; the teacher's knowledge of each child's abilities and needs; choices as to how the learning environment will be structured (e.g., small group, whole group, etc.); and a balance of implicit and explicit instruction, depending on the situation and the needs of the child.

Some core understandings about reading and reading instruction have been synthesized from a number of different sources (e.g., *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, *New Policy Guidelines for Reading: Connecting Research and Practice*, *Best Practices: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools*, *and Exemplary Reading Programs in Illinois Public Schools):*

- Reading is the process of constructing meaning from text.
- Background knowledge and prior knowledge experience are critical to the reading process.
- Social interaction is essential in learning to read.
- Reading and writing develop together.
- Reading as learning involves complex thinking.
- Environments rich in literacy experiences, resources, and models facilitate reading development.
- Engagement in the reading task is critical to successfully learning to read.
- Children develop phonemic awareness and knowledge of phonics through a variety of literacy opportunities, models, and strategies.
- Children learn successful reading strategies in the context of real reading.
- A balanced approach to reading instruction is most successful when teachers use a variety of strategies to model and demonstrate reading knowledge, strategies, and skills.
- Children need many opportunities to read.
- The monitoring of the development of the reading process is essential to students' success.
- Motivating students to read is critical to their success.

Measuring Reading Achievement

A great deal of concern has been expressed about the current level of students' reading achievement. Standardized tests are frequently used at the district level to provide information about students' ability to read.

Educational assessment has been defined as the process of determining whether students have attained curricular goals (Choppin, 1990). It has traditionally focused on the recall of discrete facts with applications taking place in extremely limited contexts, such as those offered by standardized tests (Wiggins, 1993). Critics of traditional assessment have pointed out that traditional measures, such as standardized achievement tests, are poorly matched to the goals of innovative educational programs (Fullan, 1993). Related criticisms include the narrowness of test content that concentrates principally on basic skills; the mismatch between test content and curriculum and instruction; the overemphasis on routine and discrete skills with a neglect of complex thinking and problem solving; and the limited relevance of multiple-choice formats to either classroom or real-world learning (Baker, 1989; Shepard, 1989; Herman & Golan, 1990).

Dissatisfaction with traditional approaches to assessment has resulted in large part from changes in how we view instruction. Traditional assessment approaches are based on educational theory and practices that emphasize simple and discrete skills while new, more innovative practices focus on engaging students in complex, holistic thinking. Best practices in reading often involve students in meaningful decision-making and problem-solving processes; collaboration with others; the effective use of available tools; connections to real-world events and issues; and the use of interdisciplinary knowledge (Resnick, 1989). It emphasizes the holistic performance of meaningful complex tasks in challenging, authentic environments. The knowledge and experiences that students bring to school is valued. Prior knowledge is expanded and refined by connecting it to new learning, and making curriculum content relevant to important issues and tasks in students' lives. In doing so, they develop interpersonal competencies for creating and participating in a dialogue with individuals who have different perspectives and come from diverse backgrounds (Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992).

Educators continue to be concerned about what appears to be a decline in students' reading achievement. Although problems with the testing instrument may be part of the reason for the apparent decline, no one is absolutely certain why reading scores are declining. It is likely, however, that improvements in instruction will have a positive impact on student test scores.

Design and Methodology

Overview

This research study is based on multiple sources of data: (1) classroom observations for the purpose of gathering qualitative information about reading practices and instruction, (2) a teacher/staff questionnaire to gather quantitative data on teachers' self-reported instructional strategies and areas of emphasis, (3) group interviews to gather qualitative information concerning the successes and challenges of the current reading program, (4) Individual teacher interviews to gather in-depth information on teachers' views of reading, (5) a match between reading/language arts/humanities curricula and state standards, and (6) analyses of IGAP and CTBS test scores for the purpose of gathering quantitative information on student achievement in reading.

Research questions helped frame our research activities and inform the development of the data collection instruments. The questions focused on three key areas of District 31's reading/language arts programs: Teachers' beliefs about reading and reading instruction, reading practices, and factors influencing reading instruction and students' reading achievement.

The study was carried out in three phases:

Phase I:	Development of Data Collection Instruments
Phase II:	Data Collection
Phase III:	Analyzing, Synthesizing, and Reporting the Data

A description of each phase follows.

Phase I: Data Collection Instruments

In conjunction with administrators from District 31, our research team developed a set of questions and issues to discuss at group and individual interviews, wrote protocols to ensure consistency in data collection activities during classroom observations, and developed a teacher/staff questionnaire related to reading practices and instructional approaches.

Six primary research questions guided us in creating the data collection instruments and in analyzing the data. The questions are as follows:

1. What are the critical features of District 31's reading programs?
2. What contextual factors impact the implementation of these programs?
3. What strategies within the District are available for supporting the implementation of the programs?
4. How consistently are programs being implemented within and across grade levels?

5. What is the impact of various program components on student achievement in reading?
6. How well is reading achievement currently being measured?

Data Collection Instruments. The following data collection instruments were developed for this study.

Group Interviews with Teachers. To identify the major issues surrounding the planning and implementation of reading instruction in the district, group interviews were conducted with reading/language arts teachers and staff at both the elementary and middle schools in District 31. An interview protocol was used to facilitate discussion. Responses to the uniform standard questions contributed to the final analysis of the study findings.

Individual Interviews with Teachers. To investigate all of the major research questions presented earlier, individual 20-minute interviews were conducted with teachers and staff at the elementary and middle schools. An interview protocol was used to facilitate information gathering. Responses to the questions contributed to the final analysis of the study findings.

Teacher/Staff Questionnaire. A teacher/staff questionnaire designed to gather information relevant to the first two research questions was administered to all elementary and middle school teachers in the district. The first part of the questionnaire focuses on general information related to school climate. The second part of the questionnaire focuses on program specific information by asking reading/language arts/humanities teachers to indicate whether or not certain program characteristics are present in their instruction, and the extent to which they are present (amount of time spent on specific tasks). We also gathered information about the extent to which reading is part of content area instruction at grades 3, 6, and 8.

Program specific characteristics were viewed from the lens of best practices in reading that have been identified in the research literature include the following:

- The teaching of reading and writing as processes
- The integration of reading and writing across the curriculum
- Use of discussion to promote literate behaviors
- Use of collaborative activities
- A balanced approach to instruction
- Breadth and depth of reading experiences
- Independent reading
- Focus on reading for meaning
- Evaluation that focuses on processes and informs instruction

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- Vision/philosophy of reading and reading instruction
- Alignment of assessment with instruction

To the extent possible, other non-program specific characteristics that have been demonstrated to impact student achievement were also examined, including:

- Resources for accommodating ESL and special needs students
- Program and staff support
- Professional development
- Program effectiveness from the teachers' point of view

Classroom Observation Protocol. Reading instruction was observed in classrooms across all grade levels (K-8, ESL/bilingual, special education, Title 1) in order to better understand how instruction is actually delivered. Observation notes were analyzed according to major categories contained in the protocol to reveal themes. These themes were categorized initially as strengths, issues, and opportunities for growth. Additional data collection and review occurred during the observations. Researchers summarized notes after each observation.

Document Review. Document review informed the research process to varying degrees. Among the documents analyzed were student work samples, report card forms, letters to parents, lesson plans, lists of reading books, and other relevant documents pertinent to current reading instruction.

Phase II: Data Collection : Data Collection: Data Collection: Data Collection

Phase II included the following data collection activities:

- Group interviews
- Teacher/staff interviews
- Classroom observations
- Collection of CTBS and IGAP achievement data
- Administration of teacher/staff questionnaire
- Alignment of curricula with state standards

Recognizing that student achievement is not the sole responsibility of the teacher at the grade level at which a standardized test is administered, we included teachers at all grade levels (K-8). All of the participants completed questionnaires, and were interviewed, and observed.

A team of three researchers collaborated on the implementation of the study. All three researchers conducted the group interviews and classroom observations; and two researchers conducted individual teacher/staff interviews. A special consultant to the study investigated the alignment between curricula and state standards. A data analysis team provided the statistical analyses of student achievement based on CTBS and IGAP scores.

Each researcher became as familiar as possible (given the time constraints of the project) with the ongoing activities and points of view of school staff in a variety of roles. The specific data collection activities included the following:

Preliminary Meeting. An initial meeting with the district superintendent and director of curriculum was held to gather information about the schools' reading/language arts curriculum; the availability of standardized test data; and the availability of teachers, reading specialists, and program coordinators to participate in interviews, the collection of artifacts, scheduling classroom observations, and the administration of questionnaires.

Focus Group Meetings. Researchers conducted four focus groups with district reading/language arts teachers, each session lasting approximately 3 hours. Each focus group consisted of a mixture of K-12 teachers. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain preliminary information about issues within the district concerning the current reading/language arts program (see Appendix B for guiding questions). This information was used to inform the development of the individual teacher interview.

Individual teacher/staff interviews. Researchers spoke with teachers, program coordinators, and Title I , ESL/bilingual, and Special Education teachers individually. Relatively formal interviews were held by appointment at the school with two interviewers and the interviewee present, each lasting for approximately 20-minutes. Less formal interviews included spontaneous, short conversations with teachers between classes. Recording methods included hand-written notes (taken during the interview) and audiotapes. We found that most individuals were eager to speak with us about the program and we made every attempt to accommodate teachers' schedules to the fullest extent possible. After gathering summary information on specific program components and practices, the interviewer focused on issues related to program design, professional development, instructional materials, and so on.

Classroom Observations. All reading/language arts, bilingual/ESL, special education, and Title 1 teachers were observed at least once. Teachers at the grade levels at which the state test is administered (3, 6, and 8) were observed twice. Each observation lasted approximately 45 minutes, and took place in the classroom during reading instruction.

Observations were designed to document teaching practices including grouping, materials use, and lesson content. Field notes were taken during the observations.

Document Collection. Study participants gave us copies of some of the records of their efforts whenever possible. Lesson plans, student assignments, and other documents related to the reading program contributed to data related to current teaching practices and school organization. Documents were collected on an informal, voluntary basis.

Teacher Questionnaire. Each teacher in the study was asked to complete a lengthy two-part questionnaire (see Appendix B). The first part of the questionnaire focused on teacher background characteristics and general classroom and instructional information. Part II of the questionnaire consisted of a detailed accounting of time spent on teaching specific reading skills and strategies. Teachers were to estimate the amount of time spent on teaching each skill or strategy. Completed questionnaires were returned to NCREL.

Curriculum Analysis. Direct evidence for the curriculum analysis was drawn from an examination of three curriculum notebooks submitted by the district (Field School 6th Grade Humanities, Field School 7th and 8th Grade Integrated Language Arts, and Winkelman School K-5 Reading /Language Arts). Additional indirect evidence regarding the curriculum was inferred from comments made by the teachers in the focus groups and individual interviews, from the surveys of instructional practices, and from classroom observations.

The information regarding ISBE's efforts to move Illinois schools to a standards based system in which local curriculum and assessments are aligned with state mandated assessments was taken from the notebook provided for superintendents at the 1997 Superintendents' Conference on Illinois Learning Standards and the ISBE publication entitled *The Illinois Reading Assessment: Classroom Connections.*

A comparison was then made between the recommendations of the ISBE and the present District 31 curriculum as represented by the printed materials, classroom observations, and teacher reports.

Phase III: Data Analysis and Reporting

Interviews, observations, questionnaires, student achievement data records, and school curriculum documents were the major sources of data for this study. The teacher questionnaire provided extensive, descriptive data and further elaborated information gathered at the sites. The analysis of the teacher questionnaire involved summarizing the data according to the research questions (for example, training, impact on students, and so on), and exploring similarities and differences occurring among teachers at different school levels (i.e., elementary versus middle). Research staff examined the interview information, classroom observation reports, and teacher

questionnaire data for effective practices and barriers to effective practice, as well as for consistency between the reports and questionnaires.

Data analysis began following each observation and interview, as researchers (individually) reviewed sources of information to identify recurring themes and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Subsequent interviews and observations were adapted to focus on emerging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data and tentative interpretations were presented and discussed during periodic meetings of the research team. Areas of major concern included (a) context and its relationship to instruction (e.g., school setting and student population factors); (b) instructional practices (with a focus on materials and procedures); and (c) teacher beliefs about reading instruction (including program goals, perceptions of strengths and weaknesses, and impact on students' ability to read).

The questionnaire, 38 questions (13 pages in length), was sent out to the broader sample of teachers in the district. The focus of the questionnaire was on teacher beliefs and instructional practices (see Appendix B). Most of the items were presented in a closed response format. The items on the questionnaire were similar in focus to the individual interview questions (e.g., emphasis given to skill and strategy instruction).

Descriptive Findings

Overview

The data from this study are reported in two sections. In the first section, we offer a summary of the findings relative to three key areas: (a) context and its relationship to instruction (e.g., school setting and student population factors); (b) instructional practices; and (c) teacher beliefs about reading instruction (including program goals, perceptions of strengths and weaknesses, and impact on students' ability to read). In the second section, we offer a detailed analysis and interpretation of the student achievement data and the analysis of alignment between curriculum and state standards for learning.

More than half (57%) of the teachers who completed the questionnaire were elementary level teachers (grades 1 to 5), and 43 percent taught middle/junior high school (grades 6 to 8). A total of 40 school staff members participated in both the individual and group interviews, including teachers, program coordinators, and instructional aides. All of the staff interviewed also completed a questionnaire.

All of the participants in the interview process taught reading/language arts, and the majority of questionnaire respondents (67 percent) reported teaching reading or the humanities, or providing instruction to support reading development (e.g., Title 1). We conducted 65 classroom observations at the elementary level, and 22 at the middle school level.

Part I

Teachers' Beliefs about Reading and Reading Instruction

As part of the individual interviews, teachers were asked to characterize their philosophy of learning, reading, and instruction. At the elementary level, the majority of teachers felt that

- Balance is important—must balance the need for phonics knowledge with comprehension focused instruction.
- Emphasize comprehension and the use of reading strategies.
- Emphasize decoding within the context of a story.
- We say we don't teach phonics but we do. Always talking about letters and sounds, but it's done within a meaningful context.

One of the critical attributes of the primary program that engendered a great deal of discussion is developmentally appropriate practices, although, there was some disagreement about what "developmentally appropriate" means in the classroom. There was more agreement among

teachers at the primary level about what the term means than between the primary and elementary levels.

When asked about the current program at the middle school level, the majority of middle school teachers reported that

- Good readers have many different strategies, and are able to monitor their own comprehension.
- No one approach works for everyone.
- Students should be able to respond personally, and critically, and make connections with a variety of texts.
- Reading should be done within a content area.
- It's important to have a variety of opportunities to interact with text.
- Reading and writing is a vehicle for thinking.

In a related interview question, teachers were also asked to explain what they think is the most important thing (or things) students need to learn in order to be good readers. Responses at the elementary level including the following points:

- It is important that students develop phonetic awareness. We need a systematic approach to phonetic awareness and phonics instruction.
- Students must be able to decode.
- Students must be able to connect what they read to their personal experiences.
- As students mature and develop reading skills and strategies, comprehension should become the focus of instruction.

At the middle school level, responses included the following:

- Students should have a repertoire of strategies in order to make meaning.
- Must give students opportunities to read a variety of different types of books.
- Students must be able to see that what they are learning is interesting and relevant to their lives.
- Scaffolding and modeling are important aspects of strategy instruction.

Teachers were also asked to share their opinion of the current reading program, and to describe which aspects of the program were easiest and which were the most difficult to implement and why. Responses highlighted many different aspects of the programs in District 31. Elementary teachers made a number of positive points about the current program included the following:

- The current program is exciting for students, and the books are great.
- We like having the freedom to make decisions.
- The current program really motivates students to read.

A number of concerns regarding the elementary reading program were also expressed:

- We don't have enough time to work with students who are struggling readers.
- At the early levels, there isn't enough emphasis on decoding.
- There aren't enough books to accommodate the range of readers typically found in a classroom.
- There should be more structure to the program at the primary level, especially for teaching non-readers. Having a basal available as a resource might help solve this problem.
- The program is not as strong as it was before the introduction of Whole Language.

Similarly, middle school teachers emphasized several positive key points, such as the freedom they enjoy in terms of instructional decision-making. Other positive comments include the following:

- Students are given lots of opportunities to read a variety of texts.
- Good collaboration among staff in planning for instruction.
- A rich variety of materials from which to choose.
- Students are really challenged.

However, middle school teachers also voiced concerns with the current program.

- Too many students are reading texts at their frustration level rather than at their instructional level.
- The influx of bilingual and ESL students will necessitate changes in the current program.
- The curriculum does not provide teachers with strategies for addressing reading problems.
- The program is reading based but it is not really a reading program.
- Not enough time is actually spent on the teaching of reading.
- Many students seem to lack the necessary strategies for dealing with text.

Teachers were also asked what they would like to change about the program and why they would change it. At the elementary school level, teachers voiced the need for more structure: "We don't have textbooks, so we have to invent everything ourselves." A few teachers commented that they would really like to continue with the current program, but would like more structure. This desire for structure often accompanied concerns about their ability to meet the needs of all children. Some teachers wondered if students were really getting what they need. A number of other suggestions were offered for improving the current program:

- It would be helpful to have more structure within the program, with student learning goals clearly identified.

- We need to have more communication between teachers.
- It's important to ensure consistency in instructional approach through the elementary grades.
- We need a cohesive plan for progression.
- We need explicit skills instruction now more than ever.
- We must expand our knowledge base of best practices.
- Beginning teachers need more support.

Teachers at the middle school level also had specific recommendations for improving the current program:

- We need more remediation in reading. We need double the time on task.
- We need to do more modeling of reading strategies for students.
- The pacing of the program is too fast—slow it down!
- We need a transitional program between the elementary and middle school levels.
- Current program lacks balance—there's too much emphasis on writing as opposed to reading.

As part of the interview process, we also asked teachers to place themselves on a continuum of instructional approaches (see Figure 1), with the center point representing a balanced approach to reading instruction (i.e., an approach that combines elements of whole language and phonics). At the end points of the continuum were those who identified themselves as strictly whole language and strictly phonics.

Figure 1. Teachers approach to reading instruction

1	3	28	5	3
Isolated Phonics		Balanced Approach		Strictly Whole Language

As shown in Figure 1, almost all teachers who were interviewed described themselves as having a balanced approach to reading instruction. They regarded their instructional approach as solid and well rounded. Often reading groups are formed (mixed in ability) for certain kinds of work. Reading and writing instruction is integrated. These teachers are enthusiastic about their program and consider themselves as being within the norm of reading teaching practices. For support and information they turned to workshops and the professional literature.

On the left side of the continuum (moving away from the center) are three teachers who, to varying degrees, described their approach to reading instruction as incorporating skills instruction and additional practice in the area of phonics. The teacher who identified with the far left side of the continuum spends instructional time on letter names and sounds using materials

obtained through personal initiative or from older basals. This teacher reports a heavy emphasis on phonics.

On the right side of the continuum (again, moving away from the center) are the teachers who, to varying degrees, incorporate some skills instruction into the teaching, but maintain a focus on literature. These teachers enjoyed teaching from the literature, but were not confident that all of the skills could be taught without a more structured program. Having a basal available as a resource only would be fine with them.

On the far right side of the continuum are three teachers who do not include explicit skills instruction in any significant way in their classrooms. These teachers rely almost exclusively on the literature for instruction. Most of the instruction is offered to the whole class, with groups formed (based primarily on mixed ability) for certain kinds of mini-lessons. These teachers integrate reading and writing instruction across the curriculum, to some extent.

School effects were not apparent. We found as much diversity within patterns of teacher thinking about reading instruction within schools as between schools. Teachers in the same school do not necessarily express similar views or use similar terms in describing beliefs and practices. At the elementary level, there seems to be little co-planning of teaching and collaboration in determining the curriculum for the year. And some primary teachers appear to be very uncomfortable with their current practices.

In order to better understand reading/language arts teachers' beliefs about how reading is best taught, teachers were asked to respond to two hypothetical teaching situations on the teacher/staff questionnaire. They were asked to indicate what they believed to be the best approach or sequence of approaches to help students learn in these situations. Teachers were to number the approaches in the order in which they would consider using them. If they would use only one approach, they were instructed to place a "1" next to that item only. They could also write zero in the box for any approach they would not consider using.

Reading Scenario 1 was based on the following:

> Students are reading a passage and having trouble with the vocabulary words. Usually they only memorize the glossary definitions of vocabulary words. They are unable to relate any of the words to other contexts or remember or apply the definitions after the chapter is completed. Students have a great deal of trouble recalling information or transferring it to other contexts.
>
> If you were working with a class in which many students were having the same difficulties as the students in the class above and if there were no time constraints on what you might do in responding to this, what approach or sequence of approaches do you believe would best help students learn?

Both elementary and middle school teachers ranked approaches (b) and (f) as the most desirable approach to use in this situation (see Table 1). When asked which of the approaches they believed to be the least acceptable, more than half of the elementary teachers and middle school teachers selected option (c).

Table 1. Ranking of Approaches to Vocabulary Instruction

	Average Rank	
Approach	**Elementary**	**Middle**
(a) Explain to students that vocabulary words are labels for concepts that are interrelated and build upon each other.	5.2	5.0
(b) Ask questions about various vocabulary words in the passage and lead them to understand the meaning of those words.	1.7	2.1
(c) Ask students to look up each vocabulary word in the glossary or dictionary and use it in a sentence.	5.1	4.4
(d) Ask students to rewrite the passage using words that made sense to them.	3.9	2.7
(e) Demonstrate how the meaning of the vocabulary words is important in other contexts.	2.6	2.8
(f) Have students discuss what they think the meaning of each of the words is and why.	1.7	1.6

Elementary: N=29. Middle: N=11

The second reading scenario presented the following situation:

> Students have been asked to discuss the main points of a passage about a social studies topic. Most of the students in the class appear to be having difficulty with this task. When asked how they identify main points, students said they look in the first and last paragraphs of the passage.
>
> If you were working with a class in which many students were having the same difficulties as the students in the class above and if there were no time constraints on what you might do in responding to this, what approach or sequence of approaches do you believe would best help students learn?

Both elementary and middle-school teachers indicated that approaches (b) and (f) were the most acceptable approaches (see Table 2). The least acceptable approach for both groups of teachers was approach (a).

Table 2. Rank of Approaches to Main Idea Instruction

	Average Rank	
Approach	**Elementary**	**Middle**
(a) Give students an accurate explanation of the meaning of the main points of the passage.	5.0	0
(b) Ask questions that lead students to understand the main points of the passage.	1.7	1.8
(c) Give students a series of activities designed to help them identify the main points of the passage.	2.4	2.3
(d) Give students my interpretation of the main points and ask them to find evidence to support or refute my interpretation.	4.9	3.2
(e) Point students to relevant parts of the passage.	4.7	5.1
(f) Have students discuss what they learned from the passage and wait for the main points to emerge in the discussion.	2.0	1.0

Elementary: N=28. Middle: N=12

Teaching Process

In an effort to obtain information about the teaching process, teachers were asked to think about the last reading/ILA/humanities lesson they taught to their class. If the last lesson taught was atypical (e.g., an examination or a field trip), teachers were instructed to pick the previous lesson. Nearly all of the elementary (89%) and middle school teachers (71%) who responded to this question selected a lesson that was a continuation of a previous lesson on the same topic. On average, these lessons lasted 43 minutes at the elementary level and 48 minutes at the middle level.

Teachers were then given a list of activities that might typically occur during a lesson. Although the list was not exhaustive of what happens in a classroom, it contained many of the activities commonly found in classrooms. Using this list, teachers were asked to indicate how their lesson was developed. They were to indicate the order in which the activities listed took place, and to

estimate the amount of time spent on each one. Teachers were directed to ignore activities that were used that did not fit the descriptions on the list. Any of the activities on the list not done in the classroom were given a zero.

Table 3 contains the average rank and amount of time spent on each of the items on the list. Middle school teachers were more likely than elementary level teachers to engage students in extended writing activities or silent reading near the end of a lesson as opposed to the beginning of the lesson. However, elementary teachers were more likely to wait until the end of the lesson to introduce homework than middle school teachers. No major differences were found for the amount of time spent on any of the items on the list at the elementary or middle school levels. Both elementary and middle-school teachers ranked reviewing previous lessons, and introducing a topic at the top of the list.

Table 3. Rank of Instructional Activities and Minutes Spent Teaching

		Average	
Activity	**Level**	**Rank**	**Minutes**
(a) review previous lesson(s)	Elementary	1.0	5.4
	Middle	1.1	5.2
(b) short quiz or test to review previous lesson	Elementary	2.0	10.0
	Middle	4.0	5.0
(c) oral recitation or drill (students reading or responding aloud)	Elementary	4.2	10.6
	Middle	3.4	12.2
(d) review or correction of previous lesson's homework	Elementary	2.0	6.0
	Middle	3.0	7.1
(e) introduction of a topic (class discussion, teacher explanation/demonstration, film, video, use of concrete materials, etc.)	Elementary	2.3	9.2
	Middle	2.4	8.8
(f) development of a topic (class discussion, teacher explanation/demonstration, group work, film, video, etc.)	Elementary	3.0	13.5
	Middle	3.4	16.4
(g) small group activities (with or without teacher)	Elementary	4.3	15.6
	Middle	4.6	16.3
(h) students do paper-and-pencil exercises related to topic (not the same as homework)	Elementary	4.9	14.6
	Middle	4.7	9.8
(i) assignment of student homework	Elementary	7.9	2.9
	Middle	5.6	2.8
(j) students work on homework in class	Elementary	9.5	3.5
	Middle	6.9	5.1
(k) extended writing activities related to reading or conducting research on a topic	Elementary	5.4	17.7
	Middle	7.4	13.3
(l) silent reading	Elementary	5.6	12.9
	Middle	8.7	9.0

Elementary: N = 26, Middle: N=20

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Observations in classrooms at both the elementary and middle levels support the questionnaire findings with respect to the fact that teachers make a real effort to help students make connections between what is being read and real life or prior experiences. For example, in a primary classroom where the teacher was introducing a story about a new boy at school, she asked students to share their experiences with beginning something new, such as the first day of school, in order to activate prior knowledge about the topic.

Table 4 shows the percentage of teachers reporting the frequency with which they engaged in certain instructional activities, such as using computers or practicing reading skills and strategies. Both groups of teachers said they emphasized four instructional activities: explaining the reasoning behind ideas, working on questions for which there are no immediate answers, practicing reading skills and strategies, and writing. Elementary teachers reported practicing reading skills and strategies every day, while more middle school teachers said they practice skills and strategies some of the time.

Instructional activities receiving the least amount of emphasis by both groups of teachers include using computers, and representing and analyzing relationships using tables, graphs, or charts. These last two findings are consistent with information obtained during the individual and group interviews regarding teachers' reports at both levels that reading skill and strategy instruction for dealing with informational text, which would include reading graphs, charts, and tables, is limited. Similarly, computers are used primarily for writing purposes rather than as tools to support instruction and learning.

Table 4. Percent of Teachers Engaging in Various Instructional Activities

		Percent of Teachers			
Activity	Level	Never	Some	Most	Every
(a) explain the reasoning behind an idea	Elementary	0	20	47	33
	Middle	4	22	22	52
(b) represent and analyze relationships using tables, charts, or graphs	Elementary	7	68	21	4
	Middle	17	57	26	0
(c) work on questions for which there are no immediately obvious answers	Elementary	13	37	40	10
	Middle	9	27	50	14
(d) use computers	Elementary	54	46	0	0
	Middle	36	59	5	0
(e) write	Elementary	3	23	43	30
	Middle	9	23	46	23
(f) practice reading skills and strategies	Elementary	7	3	33	57
	Middle	14	27	36	23

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

When asked about how often they engaged in specific grouping strategies for organizing their classrooms for instruction, more than half of the teachers (57% of elementary and 61% of middle) said they have students work in small groups with assistance from the teacher almost

every day (see Table 5). The majority of the teachers questioned also reported having students work individually without assistance from the teacher, work together as a class, work in small groups or pairs at least some of the time.

These patterns of response to the questionnaire suggest the same diversity of beliefs and practices evident in the actual classroom observations. We saw elementary and middle school teachers using both heterogeneous and homogeneous groups, and grouping students according to the purposes of activities.

Table 5: Percent of Teachers Reporting Different Types of Classroom Organization

Activity	Level	Never	Some	Most	Every
(a) work individually without assistance from the teacher	Elementary	13	53	17	17
	Middle	9	65	22	4
(b) work individually with assistance from the teacher	Elementary	0	40	40	20
	Middle	4	57	30	9
(c) work together as a class with the teacher teaching the whole class	Elementary	10	50	33	7
	Middle	4	57	35	4
(d) work together as a class with students responding to one another	Elementary	3	33	47	17
	Middle	0	65	30	4
(e) work in pairs or small groups without assistance from the teacher	Elementary	20	57	13	10
	Middle	13	65	22	0
(f) work in pairs or small groups with assistance from the teacher	Elementary	0	0	57	37
	Middle	4	4	61	35

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Teachers were also asked about the different types of groupings used in their classrooms. As shown in Table 6, the majority of elementary teachers report grouping by ability (73%) and interest (86%) some of the time. The majority of middle school teachers reported less grouping overall, with 68 percent indicating they never group by ability, and 48 percent reporting they never form groups based on student interests.

Table 6: Percent of Teachers Reporting Different Types of Grouping Practices

Activity	Level	Never	Some	Most	Every
(a) Ability Groups	Elementary	13	73	10	3
	Middle	68	32	0	0
(b) Interest Groups	Elementary	14	86	0	0
	Middle	48	43	3	0
(c) Disciplinary Reasons	Elementary	52	38	10	0
	Middle	76	19	1	0

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

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Teachers' responses to a question about the frequency with which they assigned various tasks as homework can be found in Table 7. More elementary (28 %) than middle (5%) teachers reported assigning workbooks or worksheets everyday as homework. At least half the teachers in both groups said they sometimes assigned worksheets or workbooks, short writing assignments, small investigations or gathering data, and preparing oral reports.

Table 7: Percent of Teachers Assigning Different Types of Tasks as Homework

Activity	Level	Never	Rarely	Some	Always
(a) worksheets or workbook	Elementary	3	7	55	28
	Middle	20	10	65	5
(b) problem/question sets in workbook	Elementary	57	14	21	0
	Middle	40	20	25	15
(c) reading in a textbook or supplementary materials	Elementary	3	10	43	37
	Middle	0	9	68	23
(d) written definitions or other short writing assignment	Elementary	14	18	54	7
	Middle	5	15	75	5
(e) small investigation(s) or gathering data	Elementary	11	29	54	0
	Middle	5	14	81	0
(f) working individually on long term projects or experiments	Elementary	18	25	43	7
	Middle	10	10	62	19
(g) working as a small group on long term projects or experiments	Elementary	39	18	36	0
	Middle	14	19	62	5
(h) finding one or more uses of the content covered	Elementary	25	18	39	11
	Middle	10	10	80	0
(i) preparing oral reports either individually or as a small group	Elementary	15	26	52	0
	Middle	5	38	52	5
(j) keeping a journal	Elementary	21	11	32	29
	Middle	24	19	33	24

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

In an effort to determine teachers' awareness of other teachers' practices, they were also asked how often they observed other teachers in their classrooms or were observed by other teachers (see Table 8). Nearly all of the elementary (93%) and middle (65%) teachers reported they never visited another teacher's classroom. Similarly, 83 percent of the elementary and 70 percent of the middle school teachers said that teachers never visited their classrooms to observe their

teaching. However, more middle (22%) than elementary (3) teachers reported visiting another teacher's classroom once per year.

Table 8: Percent of teachers who observe and are observed

		Percentage of Teachers			
Activity	**Level**	**Never**	**Annually**	**Semi-Annually**	**Bimonthly**
(a) How often do you visit another teacher's classroom to observe their teaching?	Elementary	93	3	3	0
	Middle	65	22	4	4
(b) How often does another teacher visit your classroom to observe your teaching?	Elementary	83	10	7	0
	Middle	70	9	13	4

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Teachers' also reported during the interviews that they have little or no contact with colleagues across grade levels, particularly in the elementary school. So, not only are teachers not observing or being observed, they don't talk with each other about what is happening either.

Reading/Language Arts Skill and Strategy Instruction

The last part of the teacher questionnaire was designed to capture detailed information regarding the content covered in class. Teachers were asked to estimate the amount of time, in hours, spent teaching specific skills and strategies this year.

Teachers were also asked to estimate the number of minutes spent on reading and reading related instruction. As might be anticipated, elementary teachers reported spending more minutes per week teaching reading (325 min.) than middle school teachers (150 min.). They also reported spending more minutes per week on reading related instruction (495 min.) than middle teachers (207 min.). While elementary school teachers who were interviewed said they felt they have adequate time in which to teach reading/language arts, middle school teachers complained that too little time had been allotted for humanities.

Table 9 shows the average number of hours spent teaching general reading skills and strategies at the elementary and middle school levels. At the elementary level, major emphasis is given to asking questions during reading (26 hours), reflecting on learning after reading (26 hours), and making predictions (22 hours). Elementary teachers reported a moderate amount of emphasis on decoding words using phonics and structural analysis (16 hours). This is consistent with classroom observations in which teachers were found to focus on questioning, and self-reflection after reading through journal writing.

Similarly, at the middle school level, the majority of time is spent on asking questions (23 hours), reflecting on learning (22 hours), and making predictions (14 hours). Areas receiving the least

amount of instruction include determining the purpose of persuasive text (9 hours) and specific devices for persuasion (7 hours). Middle school teachers do not spend much time on adjusting reading speed (6 hours), determining the purpose of persuasive text (6 hours), or decoding words (6 hours).

Table 9: Average Number of Hours Spent Teaching General Reading Skills and Strategies

Activity	Hours	
	Elementary	Middle
(a) making predictions	22	14
(b) decoding unknown words using context clues	19	13
(c) using a glossary and dictionary	15	8
(d) adjusting reading speed to suit purpose and material	12	6
(e) determining the purpose of persuasive text	9	6
(f) decoding words using phonic & structural analysis, syntactic structures, and semantic context	16	6
(g) monitoring text confusion	16	12
(h) representing concrete information as explicit mental pictures	12	8
(i) asking questions during reading	26	23
(j) reflecting on learning after reading	26	22
(k) specific devices used for persuasion	7	10
(l) specific strategies for clearing up text confusion	16	13
(m) relating specific interests to selection of materials	16	8
(n) texts from the perspective in which they were written	10	11
(0) author's purpose	10	11
(p) author's point of view	10	12

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Note: The number of hours reported in this table are approximations based on categories of information contained in the questionnaire.

Table 10 shows the average number of hours spent teaching specific skills and strategies related to reading literature. Not surprisingly, it appears that more time at the middle level (21 hours) is spent having students share their responses to literature and recognizing the use of literary devices than at the elementary level (12 hours) since these are activities in which more experienced readers typically engage. Elementary teachers emphasize making inferences (21 hours), personal response to text (21 hours), and elements of plot (22 hours). Middle school teachers report major emphasis on elements of plot (25 hours), conflict development (21 hours), literary devices (21 hours), and peer responses (21 hours).

The mean number of hours spent teaching skills and strategies related to reading informational text are found in Table 11. Overall, less emphasis is given to teaching skills and strategies for reading informational text than for reading literary text at both the elementary and middle school levels. At the elementary level, the most emphasis is given to recognizing information as new

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Table 10: Average Number of Hours Spent on Teaching Skills and Strategies for Reading Literature

Activity	Hours	
	Elementary	Middle
(a) using literature to better understand the actions of others	19	18
(b) main and subordinate character development	19	20
(c) relationship of events and characters real life people and situations	21	18
(d) dialogues and how they relate to stories	16	14
(e) sharing responses to literature with peers	12	21
(f) making inferences regarding character motivation	21	17
(g) elements of plot (conflict, resolution, goal)	22	25
(h) the use of literary devices	12	21
(i) personal response to a text	21	17
(j) internal/external conflicts between main and subordinate characters	12	21
(k) the stylistic effect of complex dialogues on a story	4	8
(l) abstract connections between one's own life and characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict	16	14

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Note: The number of hours reported in this table are approximations based on categories of information contained in the questionnaire.

Table 11: Hours Spent Teaching Skills and Strategies for Reading Informational Text

Activity	Hours	
	Elementary	Middle
(a) main ideas using section headings, topic sentences, and summary sentences	18	17
(b) uses of parts of book (index, table of contents, glossary, appendix)	12	6
(c) author's point of view	12	14
(d) simple hierarchic structures in texts	5	12
(e) persuasive texts to literature with peers	9	6
(f) commonly used technical terms in information texts	7	7
(g) purposes for reading, including to answer a specific question, to form an opinion, to skim for facts	15	13
(h) implied generalizations and supporting evidence in text	14	22
(i) information as new knowledge	19	20
(j) information-organizing strategies that are personally useful	15	16
(k) how peer discussions promote understanding information	17	13
(l) mathematical notations presented in writing.	7	1

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Note: The number of hours reported in this table are approximations based on categories of information contained in the questionnaire.

knowledge (19 hours) followed by using peer discussions to promote understanding of information (17 hours). At the middle-school level, the teaching of implied generalizations (22 hours), and information as new knowledge (20 hours) receive the most emphasis. Information obtained from the individual interviews supports the finding that strategies and skills for dealing with informational text receives less emphasis at both levels than literary text. The teachers we interviewed felt that they would benefit from professional development activities associated with skill and strategy instruction.

Both groups of teachers reported spending little time, overall, teaching skills and strategies related to reading information sources for the purpose of accomplishing specific tasks (see Table 11). Within this category, skills and strategies receiving the most emphasis include understanding directions or procedures (17 hours at the elementary level and 12 hours at the middle-school level), and recognizing implied generalizations and supporting evidence in text (14 hours at the elementary level and 22 hours at the middle-school level).

Table 12: Hours Spent Teaching Skills and Strategies for Using Different Information Sources to Accomplish Specific Tasks

Activity	Hours	
	Elementary	Middle
(a) directions or procedures	17	12
(b) political and social messages of cartoons	2	3
(c) schedules (bus routes, catalogues)	3	2
(d) information in a data matrix	4	2
(e) basic linear paths in organizational charts	5	7
(f) major sections in schematic diagrams	5	8
(g) symbols in a flowchart	3	3
(h) implied generalizations and supporting evidence in text	14	22

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Note: The number of hours reported in this table are approximations based on categories of information contained in the questionnaire.

Teachers were also asked about the amount of emphasis given to teaching various aspects of the writing process (Table 13). More time is spent at the elementary level (20 hours) than at the middle-school level (11 hours) teaching narrative writing. Areas of emphasis at both levels include writing expository pieces (19 hours at the elementary level and 22 hours at the middle-school level), revising one's own writing (22 hours at the elementary level and 21 hours at the middle-school level), and drafting, revising and editing (23 hours at the elementary level and 22 hours at the middle school level).

Table 13: Hours Spent Teaching Skills and Strategies of the Writing Process

Activity	Hours	
	Elementary	Middle
(a) writing stories or essays based on personal experience	24	14
(b) seeking help from others to improve writing	17	16
(c) writing stories or essays appropriate for audience	22	16
(d) writing expository pieces	19	22
(e) writing persuasive pieces	15	15
(f) writing essays that include cause and effect	9	9
(g) writing expressive pieces	17	8
(h) writing autobiographies	6	7
(i) writing narrative pieces	20	11
(j) revising content of own writing	22	21
(k) drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading written work	23	22
(l) writes for public and private audiences	14	13
(m) writing biographical sketches	5	6
(n) writing for different purposes	17	17
(o) writing for different audiences	14	10
(p) writing descriptive essays	14	10
(q) writing fictional and reflective essays	16	11
(r) strong sense of cohesion in writing	13	12
(s) clear personal style and voice in writing	12	8
(t) personal strengths and weaknesses	10	10

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Note: The number of hours reported in this table are approximations based on categories of information contained in the questionnaire.

In general, elementary level teachers spend about same amount of time teaching the general skills and strategies of reading (see Table 8 for reading skills and strategies) as they do writing (reading = 15.1 hours; writing = 15.5 hours). Middle school teachers however, spend less time teaching reading skills and strategies (11.4 hours) than writing (12.9 hours).

In response to a question regarding the average number of hours spent teaching the rhetorical aspects of writing, elementary and middle school teachers reported similar amounts of emphasis (see Table 14). Both groups reported teaching the use of descriptive language to enhance and clarify ideas (14 hours at the elementary level and 16 hours at the middle school level), recognizing the need for a variety of sentence structures and lengths (14 hours at the elementary level and 21 hours at the middle school level), and using a variety of techniques for providing supportive detail (14 hours at the elementary level and 19 at the middle level).

Table 14: Average Number of Hours Spent Teaching Rhetorical Aspects of Writing

Activity	Hours	
	Elementary	Middle
(a) use of descriptive language to enhance and clarify ideas	14	16
(b) use of explicit transitional devices	11	15
(c) need for a variety of sentence structures and lengths	14	21
(d) variety of techniques for providing supportive detail	14	19
(e) vocabulary that stimulates the reader	12	14
(f) effective use of technical terms and notations in writing	5	7

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Note: The number of hours reported in this table are approximations based on categories of information contained in the questionnaire.

Table 15 shows the average number of hours spent teaching grammatical and mechanical conventions. Significantly more time is spent on teaching the correct spelling of high frequency words at the elementary level (22 hours) than at the middle-school (9 hours) level. Both levels emphasize, to a similar extent, writing in complete sentences, the proper use of nouns, and the use of appropriate punctuation.

Table 15: Average Number of Hours Spent Teaching Grammatical and Mechanical Conventions

Activity	Hours	
	Elementary	Middle
(a) complete sentences	24	21
(b) proper use of nouns	22	19
(c) proper use of adverbial forms	15	12
(d) proper use of pronouns	20	14
(e) proper use of coordinating conjunctions	15	13
(f) correctly spelling high frequency words	22	9
(g) use of appropriate punctuation	24	19
(h) appropriate capitalization	24	15
(i) vocabulary that stimulates the reader	15	16
(j) effective use of technical terms and notations in writing	7	4

Elementary: N=31, Middle: N=23

Note: The number of hours reported in this table are approximations based on categories of information contained in the questionnaire.

PART 2

Profile of Student Achievement

Measured Reading Achievement in District 31

District 31 participates in two ongoing standardized testing programs, the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) and the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) from CTB/McGraw-Hill.[3] We will use the results of these tests to describe the current status of reading achievement in District 31. These two instruments provide accepted indicators of achievement in reading, language, writing, math, science, and social studies.

However, neither test is explicitly matched to the District curriculum. They are, therefore, not finely tuned measures of the teaching and learning that occurs in the District. They provide only a rough indicator. Unfortunately, the District appears not to have developed a consistent set of expectations, standards, and measures for reading instruction and student achievement. Without such, we must rely on these two general instruments.

To assess meaningfully the level of student achievement in reading and related skill areas, it is necessary to set some standards for measurement. Two issues dominate: assessment of achievement is not meaningful without comparison, and the choice of the measure and its metric matters. Taking each of these issues in turn:

Comparison. Current performance must be reviewed against past performance; without this, we cannot determine whether performance is improving or deteriorating. Current performance must be compared to other districts' performances; without this, we cannot determine if performance is competitive. Current District 31 performance in one area of performance must be contrasted to the District's performance in other areas; without this, we cannot make good decisions about internal resource allocations. Current District 31 performance must be related to the District's and its community's own standards of excellence; without this, we cannot determine if performance is good enough.

The discussion that follows will treat each of these comparisons in turn, except the last and most important one. Since the district has not set its own explicit standards for teaching and learning, this study cannot assess achievement and progress against them.

Measurement metric. Traditionally, standardized test results are reported to the public in one of two forms, grade equivalents or percentile ranks. While these two metrics have some distinct

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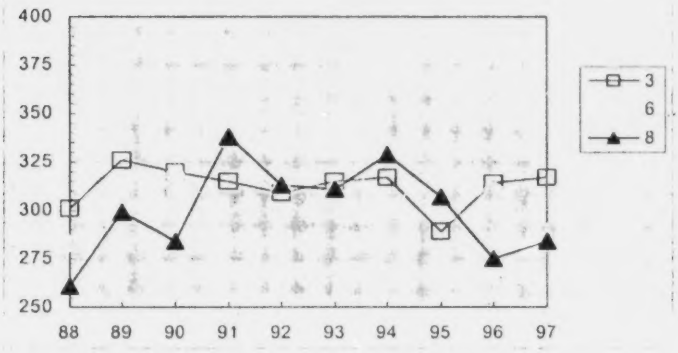
[3] The district recently converted to CTB/McGraw-Hill's newer Terra Nova instrument. Data from 1997-98 administration of this instrument are not used in this report.

advantages in (apparent) ease of interpretation of individual results, they present numerous problems for analysis of group performance. For instance, neither metric is "equal interval." At best, both are ordinal (Martin & Bateson, 1986; Merbitz, 1989). Put directly, that means that as a ruler to measure performance, their scale markings are not always equally far apart. In terms of a yardstick, it would be as if an inch at this end is longer than an inch somewhere else. Clearly, an elastic ruler will present problems in accurate measurement.

Many educational measurements are "standardized" in the measurement specialist's sense of that term. That is, measures obtained at different ages or different developmental levels are recomputed so that the scores at each age or level have the same averages and distributional characteristics. Percentile ranks have this characteristic—the average third grader is at the 50th percentile, and so is the average fourth grader.[4] They are not developmental, not conducive to charting growth. At first glance, this seems reasonable. But, note that this means that we cannot determine how much more (or less) the fourth grader knows than the third grader. And without knowing that, it is well nigh impossible to judge accurately the performance of student, teacher, or instructional program over time.

This study therefore attempts to make use of metrics which possess the desired characteristics: equal intervals, growth oriented, fine grain, and minimal disturbance. Such measures will not be elastic rulers, will permit sensing the amount of growth, will carry enough detail to make interpersonal comparisons with reasonable accuracy, and are closely connected to original measure. By this I mean that the reported measure is not the consequence of an elaborate series of operational transformations, as is commonly the case with grade equivalents or percentile ranks.

FIGURE 2. IGAP READING, DISTRICT 31



What is the history of reading achievement in District 31?

To address this question we turn to the IGAP, rather than to the CTBS. The CTBS data available for this analysis covers only three years, the 1995 to 1997 administrations. The IGAP, on the other hand, has been administered, in reading, since the spring of 1988. This state assessment program has, since its inception, been remarkably consistent in format, content, and administration (Roeber, Bond, & Braskamp, 1997). Despite

[4] The IGAP scale scores are similarly constructed—the average at all grades is 250 and the maximum score is 500. Other familiar examples include the ACT and SAT score distributions.

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some recent concerns (ISBE, 1996), it continues to provide a good basis for estimating the general trend of student reading achievement.

Figure 2 summarizes ten years of IGAP results in District 31.[5] During that time, there have been changes in the district's population, its schools, and their instructional programs Nevertheless, the figure permits several conclusions. First, District 31 has scored well above average (the state average is set at 250 for each grade) for the state at each tested grade (grades three, six, and eight) since 1989. The results for grade three have been remarkably steady. With the exception of the spring 1995 testing, the grade three average has departed little from the 315 to 325 range. At grade six, the picture is more mixed. Discounting the one-time drop in the spring of 1994,[6] it would appear that performance improved steadily from 1988 to about 1993, reached a brief plateau, and then began to fall off quite precipitously. The grade eight pattern is similar to that of grade six but with more marked gains in the first few years and a longer, slower decline over the latter half of the decade.

One may ask, what pattern is preferred? On a chart of this sort, trajectories that bounce sharply up and down are not desired. That suggests a school system in disarray, with uncertain control over its instruction and its students learning. On the other hand, lines that tend steadily upward over time, bit by bit, suggest schools which are growing in their capacity to improve student performance (assuming, of course, that the quality of the student intake is not changing). Trajectories that decline steadily are not desirable.

While it may be tempting for the reader to link these patterns to what is known of changes in instruction, staffing, or curriculum in District 31's schools, we do not encourage such linking or attempting detailed interpretation of Figure 2. It lays out some facts. But more are needed before reaching interpretations.

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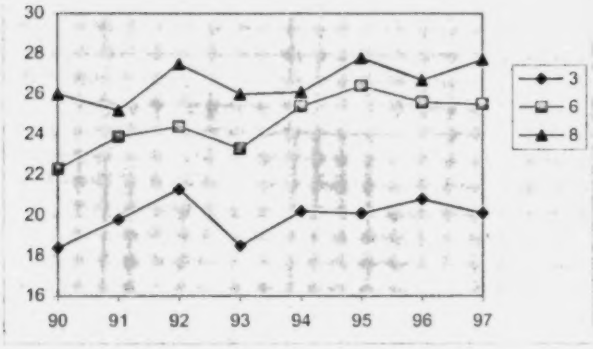
[5] Each line represents successive grade groups. That is, the 1988 third graders are fourth graders in 1989; the 1989 data point is that year's third graders. Assuming no mobility in and out of schools, the 1988 third graders reappear on this chart as 1991 sixth graders and 1993 eighth graders.
To make the data as accessible as possible, we have chosen to present a series of graphs, not tables of numbers. We have also avoided the presentation of the usual statistician's armaments (Ns, standard errors, significance levels, etc.) although we have calculated and examined these to keep us professionally honest. We chose instead to depend on the reader's own good sense and willingness to accept our guidance. To add comparability, as much as possible all charts have been specified with the same axis dimensions.

[6] These charts represent several hundred students at each data point. However, they also describe more general trajectories compounded from student learning and teacher instruction. These are not quick to change. Unfortunately, separating signal from noise in educational data is not easy. We know, however, that the spring 1994 testing was the first after the reconstruction of District 31's middle school reading curriculum to a joint reading/humanities model. Some turbulence may therefore be expected at this point.

FIGURE 3. IGAP WRITING



It is appropriate to look for a moment at achievement in writing, a subject closely allied to reading. Figure 3 presents IGAP writing results from spring 1990 onward.[7] There is considerable growth from grade three to grade six, less so from six to eight. It is also very encouraging that the successive cohorts of students tend to receive higher scores at each grade. This suggests that writing instruction is becoming more effective.

How does District 31's reading achievement compare to neighboring districts?

District 31 is a small suburban elementary district. Neighboring it are several other small suburban districts. These include Northbrook District 27, Northbrook District 28, Northbrook-Glenview District 30, and Glenview District 34. These districts, to the outsider, are nearly indistinguishable in many respects. However, locally it is the differences that stand out. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to compare District 31's IGAP results in reading to these districts' results.

FIGURE 4. IGAP GRADE 3 READING

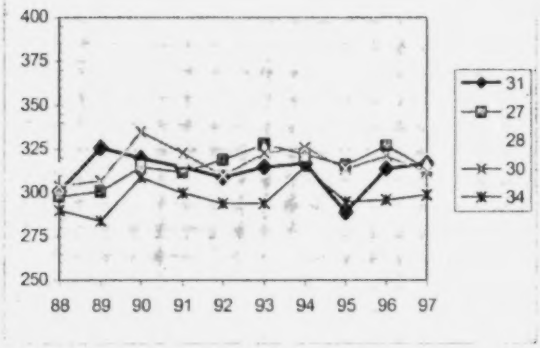


Figure 4 makes the comparison between districts for the grade three IGAP reading results. District 31's third graders remain nicely tucked into the middle of the pack of these five high-performing districts throughout the decade. Striking too is the consistency of performance for all these districts' third graders over time. The general trends are flat, with little or no signs of consistent, cumulative growth or decline.

Figure 5 paints the picture for grade six. During the first half of the decade, District 31 scored higher than the other districts, and improved steadily on its own performance. By the end of the decade, however, District 31 was just one of the pack.

[7] Writing is scored in a different and developmental metric. Hence, the amount of growth that occurs within and between grades may be estimated by the vertical differences between lines. These differences between lines can not be so interpreted in Figure 1 for reading.

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Figure 6 contains the data for grade eight in reading. Briefly during the middle of the decade, District 31's eighth graders outperformed all the other districts. At the beginning and end of the decade, however, District 31 ranked near the bottom of the pack.

Figure 6 also shows a sharp decline in reading achievement for eighth graders in all the districts from spring 1993 or 1994 onward. A similar trend, but much weaker, is also apparent upon close inspection at grade six. This trend has been observed statewide in the IGAP reading assessments above grade three and most sharply in the high school tests. This consistency suggests a common cause, either a testing artifact, a weakness in test design, or a real drop in reading achievement. An expert panel concluded the drop was in reading achievement and not in testing flaws (ISBE, 1997). However, opinions vary (Pearson, 1997). Regardless, what matters here is District 31's performance vis a vis the neighboring districts.

The IGAP writing assessment has not generally been included in these charges and discussions. Figure 7 presents the inter-district comparison for grade eight writing. (The comparisons for grades three and six are essentially the same, except for the vertical location of the lines (see Figure 3 above).) Clearly, writing performance has been improving in all these districts, and District 31 runs with the pack.

FIGURE 5. IGAP GRADE 6 READING

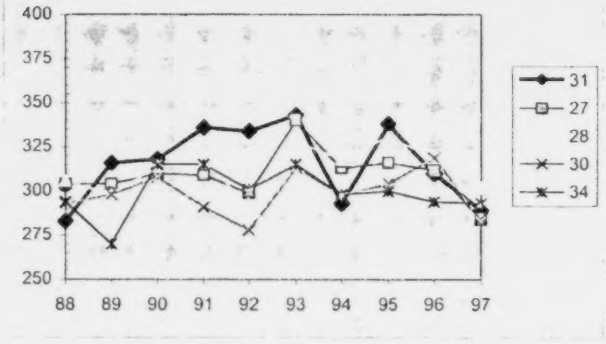


FIGURE 6. IGAP GRADE 8 READING

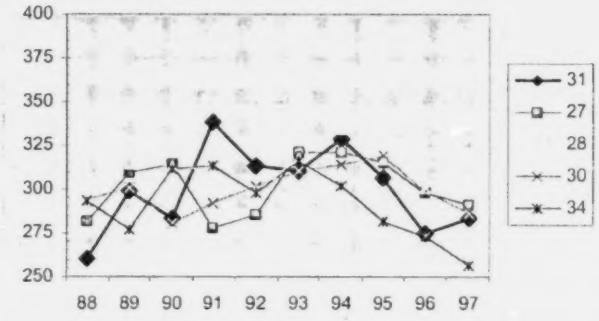
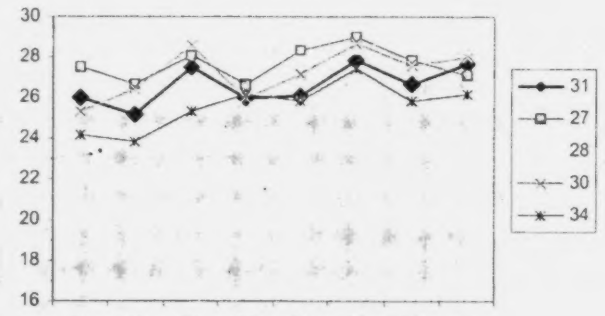


FIGURE 7. IGAP Grade 8 Writing



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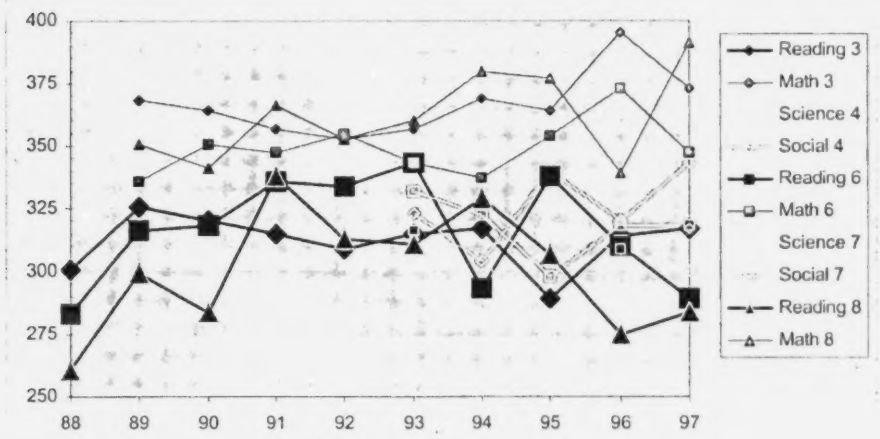
To summarize: Grade three's reading performance has been stable over the past ten years. Grades six and eight show improvement in the first half of the decade and declines thereafter. Overall, District 31's performance in reading and writing is similar to its neighboring districts, with two exceptions. The rapid improvement in the middle school student reading achievement in the first half of the decade caused District 31's achievement levels there to be first among equals. Half a decade later District 31 is the second lowest scoring of the five districts. It is easy to make too much of this change: the differences are small and the measures not as precise as they should be. However, they should alert us as we consider additional information.

How does District 31's reading achievement compare to its achievement in other subjects?

Do District 31's students perform above or below expectations in reading? To respond, of course, we need to know what the expectations are. Unfortunately, those are not set. We can substitute somewhat by comparing performances across subject areas. If reading performance is on a par with other subjects, then we might wish to say that things are all right. If reading achievement is higher or lower, other conclusions may be warranted.

Figure 8 presents data on four of the five subjects IGAP tests.[8] Clearly, District 31 students do much better in math than in reading.[9] There is in fact some sign that the district's mathematics performance has been improving recently. This would suggest that reading performance is below "expectations." However, a glance at the IGAP science and social studies performances

Figure 8. IGAP Performance by Subject



[8] The writing assessment is scored in a different metric. Unlike the standard scale used so far, its metric is developmental and growth can be directly observed.

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changes the picture. These are consistent with the reading results--their lines share the same jumbled space on the chart. Now the suggestion is that mathematics is above "expectations." Of course, that is the desideratum for the other subjects as well.

Often a second opinion matters. Although the CTBS data are not available for as many years as the IGAP, they are available for three contiguous years and for students at more grades. Figure 9 presents a comparison over these three years for the five subjects assessed by the CTBS. On this measure, even more clearly than on the IGAP, reading sharply separates itself from the chart space occupied by the other four subjects. It is also clear that the rate of growth, or learning, in reading parallels that of the other subjects.[10]

Some readers may wish to interpret the lesser incline from 1996 to 1997 compared to 1995 to 1996 in Figure 9 as evidence that the rate of growth in achievement is declining. We would caution the reader to note that only three data points in a cross-sectional time series constitutes rather weak evidence.[11] To attempt such inferences, it is necessary to use longitudinal, not cross-sectional data.

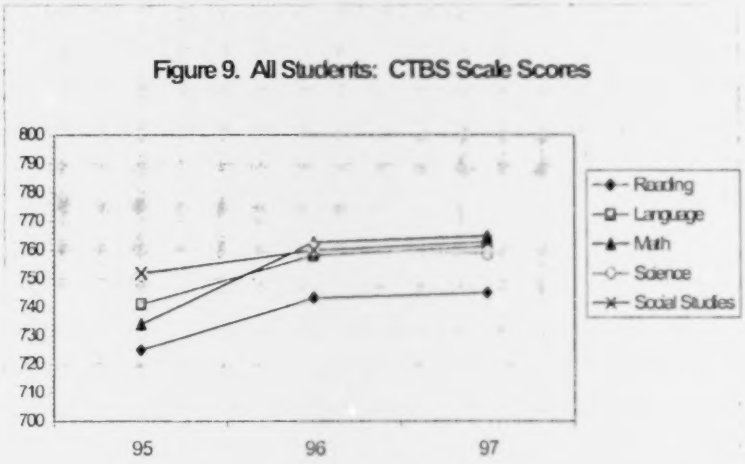

Figure 10 recalculates Figure 9 using only students with CTBS data for all three years and moving up a grade each year. Clearly, any evidence for a decline in the rate of growth

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[9] We apologize for the profusion of data points on this chart. The alternatives, however, were even less appetizing.

[10] This inference can be made because the CTBS scale score, unlike the IGAP scale, is developmental, that is, constant in psychometric characteristics and in meaning across grade levels

[11] Longitudinal times series, following the same children over time, are much preferred. The IGAP time series is ten years long, somewhat offsetting the weakness of its cross-sectional design.

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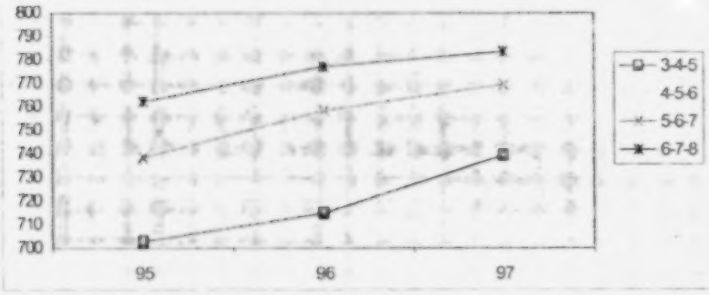
Figure 10. Continuing Students, CTBS Reading



disappears. Still, there are only three data points; at least one more would help support or deny any inference.

To summarize, the weight of the evidence is that reading performance of District 31 students as measured by standardized tests does appear to be lower than "expected" based on the performance of these students in other subjects and other nearby districts. The data also suggest that reading achievement once was higher than it is now.

It is tempting to blame the change in reading performance on changes in student and community population. However, the data examined so far suggest it is more reasonable to look at the nature of teaching, instruction, and learning in the district. Writing and social studies achievement, now linked to reading instruction in District 31, have not declined. Math and science p-rformance have also not declined. The evidence in fact suggests that writing and math achievement are rising.

Alignment of Reading/Language Arts Curriculum With Standards and Best Practices

Purpose of the Curriculum Analysis

The overall purpose of this phase of the study was to determine whether or not the district's reading/language arts curriculum aligns with the *Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts* and thus to judge the likelihood that the curriculum will prepare District 31 students to perform successfully on the IGAP Reading Assessment.

Alignment with the 1997 Illinois Language Arts Goals and Standards

The 1997 *Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts* were developed from the 1985 *State Goals for Language Arts* as well as from various other local, state, and national standards documents. These goals and standards will be used to develop benchmarks for students at various education levels in Illinois and will be the basis for the revised IGAP

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Reading Assessment to be used in 1999. Thus, it is vital that District 31 align the reading/language arts curriculum with the Illinois goals and standards to facilitate students' attainment of the standards and their success on the IGAP assessment. The five major goals and standards include the following:

Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.
- A. Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend selections.
- B. Apply reading strategies to improve understanding and fluency.
- C. Comprehend a broad range of reading materials.

Goal 2: Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras, and ideas.
- A. Understand how literary elements and techniques are used to convey meaning.
- B. Read and interpret a variety of literary works.

Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes
- A. Use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and structure.
- B. Compose well-organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences.
- C. Communicate ideas in writing to accomplish a variety of purposes.

Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.
- A. Listen effectively in formal and informal situations.
- B. Speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience.

Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.
- A. Locate, organize, and use information from various sources to answer questions, solve problems and communicate ideas.
- B. Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.
- C. Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.

(For a complete list of the *Illinois English Language Arts Standards* and the benchmarks for Early Elementary, Late Elementary, Middle/Junior High School, Early High School, and Late High School, see the Appendices.)

Analysis of the three notebooks of materials indicates that the curriculum provides multiple opportunities for the Illinois English Language Arts Goals to be achieved within the context of the activities described in the notebooks. However, the district has not conducted a systematic analysis of the units and activities to determine which goals and standards can be met within each unit and to designate which standards will need further instruction.

The units described in the upper grade materials contain many interesting activities, make frequent attempts to relate to the interests of middle school youngsters, provide multiple opportunities to practice a variety of reading, writing, and speaking skills, and offer some opportunities to address a variety of cultures.

However, the district has not yet determined the correlation between the materials and the 1997 Illinois Learning Goals and Standards. There was also no list of district goals and standards for the middle school/junior high level. Because the revised Illinois Learning Goals were released in July 1997 and the middle school curriculum materials were developed prior to their release, there has been limited time for such an analysis to occur.

Most of the units and activities in the 6th, 7th and 8th Grade Humanities and Integrated Language Arts Materials are from a published series, entitled *The Curriculum Project*, with some supplementary articles and activities selected by the teachers. Use of literature circles as described by Harvey Daniels is also encouraged. The published materials contain stated goals and objectives but these have not yet been aligned with the *Illinois Learning Standards*.

Many of the recommended selections in the middle school program are very difficult and will require a great deal of teacher support and guided reading if the majority of students are expected to handle them successfully. In their interviews, teachers expressed the belief that the middle school curriculum was very challenging and presented students with a wide variety of materials, but the teachers were concerned that too many students are being asked to read texts that are too difficult for them. Teachers believe that these texts are at students' frustration level rather than at their instructional level. Teachers further noted that the curriculum requires a great deal of reading, but that little time is spent teaching students the necessary strategies for reading and comprehending these texts. They felt that the curriculum does not provide teachers with strategies for helping students with reading problems nor with suggestions for helping the increasing numbers of LEP students cope with the difficult materials. These concerns were born out by an analysis of the curriculum materials and the suggested activities.

In the Winkelman K-5 materials, the ILA committee members had prepared an analysis of the 1985 State Goals for Learning that were addressed at each grade level. The *Crosswalk* document that compares the 1985 and the 1997 goals is included in the K-5 notebook, but the committee has obviously not yet had the time to do a realignment between the K-5 curriculum and the 1997 Goals and Standards. Also included in the K-5 notebook is a Reading and Language Arts Skill and Strategy Overview, which includes a traditional scope and sequence list of the skills and strategies which are addressed at each grade level. Again, although the *Linking Organizer* form is included in the notebook, the ILA committee has not yet analyzed the curriculum to establish the links between the 1997 State Goals/Standards/Benchmarks and the District 31 list of skills and strategies.

In the K-5 materials, the committee includes a brief, general overview of the major emphases of the reading/language arts program at each grade level (K-5). The goals to be addressed and the types of activities to be employed seem appropriate, but there is not enough specificity to enable one to determine exactly what is expected at each grade level and what type of instruction teachers are expected to provide. In their interviews, elementary teachers expressed concerns about the lack of structure in the primary reading program and worried that there was not enough emphasis on decoding or on explicit skill instruction. They wanted a more cohesive plan that focused on clearly identified learning goals and that could be communicated among teachers to promote coherence and continuity in reading instruction.

The Winkelman ILA committee has developed a *Core and Read-Aloud Book Statement* to guide teachers' selection of books. The committee indicated that books on the list were chosen because they were "integral to the curriculum for the grade level or appropriate for the majority of the students in that grade level." The books are organized around topics frequently addressed at the designated grade level and around the study of popular authors of children's literature. The list appears to offer a good selection of high quality children's literature representing a variety of genres as well as a variety of well known children's authors.

The "read aloud" lists appear to be very short and would not provide enough books for teachers to read aloud on a daily basis as best practice recommends. It is unclear whether teachers are encouraged to read aloud other books of their own choosing at a time they deem appropriate. Furthermore, teachers are discouraged from returning to a book in a later grade, which is problematic since young children frequently want to revisit favorite books and beg to have the teacher "read it again." They also often enjoy rereading a book themselves. Additionally, several theme-centered units may be served by the same book, and children may need to revisit a book in a later grade level as they do research on a given topic.

Further concerns about the designated book list include the following:

- Few books appeared to pertain to other cultures, especially to the Korean culture to which many of the youngsters in the district belong.

- The kindergarten book list focuses on only three authors. Although the three authors are excellent choices for five-year-olds, kindergarten children need exposure to many more books and authors.

The rationale for the selection of the books at the first grade level is commendable with an appropriate emphasis on predictability, supportive illustrations, and high frequency

vocabulary words. It is unclear which of the books are "read aloud" books and which are to be read by the children either independently or in guided reading situations.

Additional lists of books were provided for each grade level in the categories of "Trade Book Collection" and "Title I Trade Book Collection" which are coded separately by color of storage container. Six copies of the Title I books are available for use by all teachers for any students who may benefit from them. Even with these books available, teachers expressed concerns in their interviews that there were not enough easy books for struggling readers.

The inclusion of several related videos of books is a strength and should prove motivational for all students and especially helpful in building background knowledge for poor readers and children for whom English is a second language.

Provisions for Students for Whom English is a Second Language

What was not apparent within the collections of materials were suggestions for adjustments or provisions to be made for students who would need additional support to cope with the suggested units and activities and to read the recommended books. There were few suggestions regarding instructional strategies which classroom teachers could use to better prepare LEP youngsters or other poor readers who are reading below grade level to participate successfully in the lessons.

Need for a Continuous Assessment Program

There is only brief mention of assessment in the curriculum materials provided for examination. There are vocabulary tests associated with the middle school units from *The Curriculum Project* and a few lists of the criteria on which various writing assignments will be judged. These assessments have not been correlated with the *Illinois Learning Standards* and no attempt has yet been made to develop continuous assessments that will enable teachers to monitor students' progress toward the *Illinois Learning Standards*.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Research suggests that all innovations are multidimensional, involving three components: (1) the use of new materials, (2) the use of new teaching approaches, and (3) an alteration of beliefs (Fullan & Stiegelbaures, 1991; Hoffman, et al., 1998). All three components are necessary for achieving an educational goal, but an individual teacher may implement none, one, or more of the dimensions. Furthermore, it is possible to change on the surface without really understanding the principles and rationale for change. Changing approaches, but not philosophies, often results in hybrid forms of teaching, as appears to be the case in District 31. What has been described as an abrupt switch from a basal driven program to a program heavily emphasizing whole language instruction has contributed to the polarization of teachers' in terms of their beliefs about reading and reading instruction, and their perceptions of their colleagues' practices. On the more positive side, we found a connection between teachers' beliefs about reading and their reading practices. Yet, in order for there to be high consistency within the program across grade levels, some teachers may have to challenge their underlying beliefs about reading and the ways in which reading is taught.

Many teachers reported that the current program has a positive influence on their students. Their beliefs about the effects on students strongly reflected their own perspectives on the positive and negative features of the current program. Teacher's beliefs that the literature is appealing and motivating to students and their concerns that the lack of controlled vocabulary did not result in better reading performance by students were most likely a factor in how they implemented the new program. Teachers who believed the books available for their lower ability students went back to the basal (or expressed a desire to do so), in addition to the current program.

Based on teacher self-report data, from both the survey and interviews, as well as our classroom observations, we saw evidence that the program had positive effects on students. The strongest effects seem to be in the areas of perceived increases in students' motivation, attitudes, and independent reading as a result of the exposure to higher quality literature. The teacher self-report data on student reading ability is more difficult to interpret. One of the comments that kept surfacing during interviews was that students were no more skilled as readers now than before the current program was implemented. However, students seemed to be more willing to seek out books for their own reading.

However, we must qualify our interpretation of the positive effects of the programs on teaching and learning with respect to students who were, as one of our teachers described them, "not ready" to read at the start of the school year. The introduction of quality literature

that presents a context of opportunity for most students may create an obstacle course for less skilled readers. The demands of the texts used, in terms of vocabulary, sentence complexity, and length, may be too great for these students. Several teachers were challenged to find an instructional solution to this dilemma. The current program either contains unrealistic expectations for some students, or teachers have not been adequately prepared to offer instruction that will lead to success for all students.

There is variability from teacher to teacher in terms of individual philosophies of reading and reading instruction. Within each of the schools in this study, wide variation was found among teachers. There is also confusion about what the district's position is on reading instruction. It is also the case that individual teachers have little control over certain district policies that influence instruction, such as the scheduling of time for teachers to plan together and the amount of communication and planning with special teachers. Other areas of high consistency include the following:

- Classrooms are filled with a variety of instructional and print materials for students to use.

- Classrooms environments are warm and supportive, where students are actively involved in learning and allowed to ask questions, talk, and move about as needed. Teachers interact with students individually as well as in groups.

- Teachers focus on qualitative methods for reporting student progress to parents, such as parent/teacher conferences and qualitative progress reports.

- Little or no use is made of standardized test information with respect to informing instruction, with most teachers reporting they never see students' test scores.

- When asked about resources to support program implementation, teachers reported that internal (e.g., support from principals) support was somewhat stronger than external sources (e.g., district personnel, universities). Teachers were in agreement that district-wide professional development in reading instruction and strategies, as well as reading assessment would be helpful.

Areas of less consistency include the following:

- Less than half of the teachers observed at the elementary level used a variety of instructional strategies in their teaching or allowed students to initiate instructional activities.

- Teachers reported spending little time planning with other teachers at their grade level, and little or no time planning with teachers across grade levels. Nearly all of the teachers who participated in this study cited the need for planning time during the school day.

Recommendations

Our focus on teachers' beliefs about reading and reading instruction was quite revealing regarding how teachers approached reading instruction within the context of the current program. For some teachers, the quality literature offered in the current program offers teachers and students a range of possibilities for teaching and learning. New opportunities for student response and responsive teaching become possible in the context of quality literature. Some teachers, however, feel that the current program does little to support the development of skills and strategies, and offers a limited range of genre. These teachers are less satisfied overall with the current program.

Our final comments focus on staff development opportunities in reading. For all intents and purposes, we were told there has been very little in the way of support for teaching reading skills and strategies in a meaningful context. For some teachers, the lack of structure and support evident in the current program is overwhelming. Without staff development to support teacher learning in reading, both teachers and students struggle with implementing the current program.

Based upon the study findings, we make the following general recommendations for improving the reading/language arts curriculum in the district:

- Continue to build on the strengths of the existing program. At the elementary level, the majority of the teachers reported using a balanced approach in which comprehension and the use of reading strategies are stressed and decoding is taught within the context of meaningful stories. At the middle school level, teachers reported that they provide a variety of opportunities for students to interact with text, to make connections with text, and to respond to texts personally and critically. They also focus on helping students use a variety of strategies and monitor their own comprehension within the context of content materials. Middle school teachers reported further that they help students use reading and writing as vehicles for thinking. The district's curriculum materials need to make these beliefs and practices more explicit to promote greater coherence and continuity across grade levels and to help new teachers in the district understand and implement the reading program.

- Provide more structure for the K-5 reading/language arts program. Teachers reported that they were asked to move from a highly structured basal reading program to a literature based program with little or no staff development related to teaching reading within the

context of children's literature. There appear to be few materials available that can be shared with all teachers in the district so that greater coherence and continuity in the reading/language arts program can be achieved.

- Provide staff development for all teachers in best practices for reading instruction and in ways to support the reading and learning of poor readers and LEP students. All teachers need to use instructional strategies *before, during, and after* reading. It is especially important to provide more prereading support for weak readers and LEP students, as these students need to develop vocabulary, concepts, and prior knowledge and to set purposes *before* being asked to read independently. Literature based programs are highly motivational for students who possess the vocabulary and fluency to read the books independently; however, it will be necessary to provide more prereading and guided reading support for weaker students and for LEP students. (See ISBE *Implementing Illinois Learning Standards: What It Means For Limited English Proficient Students.*)

- Provide opportunities for the teachers to identify the goals and standards toward which they are working as they plan integrated units and individual lessons. All lessons should focus on moving students toward attainment of the goals/standards. (ISBE *Illinois Learning Standards.)*

- Provide time for teachers to work on committees to analyze the existing reading/language arts curriculum to determine if it enables all students to make satisfactory progress toward the Illinois Learning Standards. Make sure that the curriculum provides opportunities for students to meet all of the standards and make necessary adjustments in the curriculum for unmet standards and for students who need more instructional support in meeting the learning standards. (See ISBE *Ten Things Schools Can Start To Do Now To Prepare For A Standards-Based Education System.*)

- Keep abreast of the ongoing work of the Illinois Learning Standards/Benchmarks committees and the current changes in the IGAP Reading and Writing Assessments so that district curriculum and assessments are aligned with the state assessments. Develop a set of guidelines to help teachers prepare students for the IGAP reading assessment both within the context of ongoing instruction and in separate activities which focus specifically on the test taking skills necessary for success with the IGAP format.

- Develop an ongoing district wide assessment plan that enables teachers to continuously monitor students' progress toward the Illinois Learning Standards. Make adaptations in the local assessment system as needed to measure the progress of the LEP students. (See Appendix C: ISBE *Comprehensive District Assessment Planning Guide.)*

- Participate in the Illinois Right to Read Initiative. The initiative is designed to share information regarding research-based instructional practices, to identify the best instructional materials available, and to provide state funding for reading improvement. (See Appendix C: ISBE *Summary: Illinois Right to Read Initiative.)*

Specific recommendations for the reading/language arts program in District 31 include the following:

Policy and Leadership Needs

1. Strong leadership is necessary within the reading/language arts/humanities departments to ensure consistent program implementation within and across grade levels. The variation of implementation of program components should be monitored continuously, and strategies should be designed to support the development of key program components that are not being well implemented.

2. The district should clarify its position with respect to reading instruction in a clear and concise fashion.

3. Staff development is necessary to help teachers better define the following: (a) what it means to have a balanced approach to reading instruction at the primary, elementary, and middle school levels; (b) how struggling readers can be better supported through appropriate instructional strategies; and (c) how to better use standardized test information to inform instruction.

The Need for Learning Time

4. School schedules should be reviewed to determine how teachers can be provided with more time to plan with other classroom teachers and special teachers.

5. Schools should revisit the current practice of pulling ESL/Bilingual students out of reading/language arts classes for language instruction. These students need more exposure to reading in context, not less.

6. The humanities program should be reviewed with respect to the feasibility of covering program content within the time currently allotted, as well as for balance in terms of the amount of emphasis given to reading and writing instruction.

The Need to Develop New Instructional Strategies

7. Schools should identify classrooms and teachers who are using the most promising practices related to key components of the reading/language arts programs, and establish sites for teachers to visit. Teachers with success in program implementation should be utilized in professional development activities.

8. Teachers need assistance to better help students develop skills and strategies for dealing with informational texts.

9. A transition program is needed to bridge the gap that currently exists between the integrated language arts program and the humanities program.

10. The district should consider the adoption of a basal series that is consistent with the district's philosophy of reading and reading instruction. This series should be viewed as a resource rather than a mandatory part of instruction.

11. Changing student demographics require that teachers be given the necessary support to develop the strategies and skills for meeting the needs of these students within the regular classroom.

Assessment Needs

12. Identify other standardized measures of reading achievement (e.g., Gates-McGinitie) to supplement existing measures.

13. Teachers would benefit from professional development that focuses on the appropriate use of assessment information for instructional purposes.

14. Establish a process by which teachers can contribute to the on-going monitoring of reading/language arts/humanities program impact on students and teachers.

APPENDIX A
Data Collection Instruments

- **Focus Group Questions**
- **Individual Teacher Interview**
- **Teacher/Staff Questionnaire**
- **Observation Protocol**

Initial Focus Groups
District 31

Date: _____ Grade Levels: _____

Teachers: _____

_____

1. What do you know, and what would you like to know about this evaluation process? (What is the purpose, method, etc.? What do you expect to learn from it? How do you think this information should be/will be used in the district?)

2. How would you characterize your philosophy of learning, reading, and instruction? Where would you place yourself on a continuum?

3. What is the most important thing (or things) kids need to learn in order to be good readers?

4. What materials are you using for your reading instruction?

5. What is your opinion of the reading program? What part of your reading program is the most enjoyable for you to teach?

6. Why do you think reading scores are significantly lower than math and science scores?

7. What do you use to report continuous progress in your classrooms (e.g., anecdotal records, checklists, learning logs, etc.)? How do you know when your students are learning?

8. What do your progress reports look like?

9. What are the most critical attributes of your reading program? Which of those attributes are easiest to implement? Which have been the hardest?

10. What part of the reading program do students seem to like best/least, what works the best with them?

11. If you could change anything about your program, what would it be and why?

12. Describe your support/professional development opportunities to allow for changing practice, to maintain current knowledge base with respect to best practices.

13. Do you think the IGAP is a good match with curriculum and instruction? Why or why not?

14. What type of test information do you receive, and how do you use it?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add about your program?

District 31 Teacher Interview

Teacher Name:

Position at School:

School Name:

School Address:

Date:

Interviewer Name:

1. How would you characterize your philosophy of learning, reading, and instruction? Where would you place yourself on a continuum?

2. What is the most important thing (or things) kids need to learn in order to be good readers?

3. What criteria do you use to evaluate how well your students are learning?

4. What is your opinion of the reading program? What part of your reading program is the most enjoyable for you to teach?

5. Describe your progress reports.

6. What part or parts of your current reading program are easiest to implement? Which have been the hardest, and why?

7. If you could change anything about your program, what would it be and why?

8. Do professional development opportunities support changing practice, or maintaining a current knowledge base with respect to best practices?

9. What types of training and staff development would you like to have for yourself and others?

10. What type of test information would you like to receive, and how would you use it?

11. In what ways are the perceptions and involvement of parents and the wider community tied to the reading/ILA/Humanities program?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about your program?

DISTRICT 31
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please respond to the following questions as candidly and completely as possible. Your responses will be kept confidential. Thank You!

General information about you:

1. Grades taught: *(check all that apply)*

(Check all that apply)

☐ K ☐ 1st ☐ 2nd ☐ 3rd
☐ 4th ☐ 5th ☐ 6th ☐ 7th ☐ 8th

2. Subject(s) taught this year: *(check all that apply)*

☐ Reading ☐ Mathematics ☐ Art
☐ Music ☐ Other ☐ Science
☐ Special Ed. ☐ Social Science ☐ PE

3. Subject(s) you focus on most this year: *(check all that apply)*

☐ Reading ☐ Mathematics ☐ Art
☐ Music ☐ Other ☐ Science
☐ Spec. Ed. ☐ Social Science ☐ PE

4. Are you a...

☐ Classroom teacher
☐ Subject specialist (Music, PE, Art, and Science)
☐ Support specialist (media, Spec. Ed, counselor, etc...)
☐ Lead teacher

5. Approximately how many minutes did you spend on the following tasks last week?

	In School	Out of School
(a) grading classwork?	_____ minutes/week	_____ minutes/week
(b) grading homework?	_____ minutes/week	_____ minutes/week
(c) planning your lesson?	_____ minutes/week	_____ minutes/week
(d) completing student records?	_____ minutes/week	_____ minutes/week
(e) staff/group curriculum planning?	_____ minutes/week	_____ minutes/week
(f) classroom instruction?	_____ minutes/week	_____ minutes/week
(g) administrative responsibilities?	_____ minutes/week	_____ minutes/week
(h) student mentoring/counseling?	_____ minutes/week	_____ minutes/week

	Yes, Very much	Yes	No
6. Are you more enthusiastic about your work now than when you first started teaching?	☐	☐	☐
7. Would you recommend this school to a friend looking for a teaching job?	☐	☐	☐
8. Are you proud of your school?	☐	☐	☐
9. Do you enjoy your work?	☐	☐	☐
10. Is teacher excellence recognized and rewarded?	☐	☐	☐
11. Is your workload too high?	☐	☐	☐
12. Do you have enough time to teach and to help individual students?	☐	☐	☐
13. Do you have adequate time to prepare quality lessons?	☐	☐	☐
14. Do you have adequate time to conduct quality lessons?	☐	☐	☐
15. Does the leadership encourage professional risk taking and experimentation?	☐	☐	☐
16. Does the leadership adjust priorities to support risk taking and experimentation?	☐	☐	☐
17. Does the leadership frequently participate with staff in discussions of educational issues?	☐	☐	☐
18. Do you feel you are informed about what high performance means in this district?	☐	☐	☐

Pedagogical Approach to Reading

To better understand what teachers believe about how reading is best taught, we ask you to respond to two hypothetical teaching situations described on the next two pages. Some of the situations may involve topics that are tangential to your current teaching field, and therefore, may or may not be likely to occur in your classes. Nevertheless, we are interested in what you believe would be the best approach or sequence of approaches to help students learn in these situations regardless of whether they may occur in your classes.

- Imagine yourself in each situation.
- Assume that there are no time or equipment constraints.
- Choose what you believe, based on your own principles and beliefs, to be the best approach or sequence of approaches to help students learn.
- Number the boxes next to each approach in the order in which you would consider using them. If you would use only one approach, place a '1' in that box only. Write zero in the box for any approach you would not consider using.

Reading Scenario 1

Students are reading a passage and having trouble with the vocabulary words. Usually they only memorize the glossary definitions of vocabulary words. They are unable to relate any of the words to other contexts or remember or apply the definitions after the chapter is completed. Students have a great deal of trouble recalling information or transferring it to other contexts.

If you were working with a class in which many students were having the same difficulties as the students in the class above and if there were no time constraints on what you might do in responding to this, what approach or sequence of approaches do you believe would best help students learn?

Below, place a "1" in the box next to the approach you believe to be the best. If you believe other approaches would also be acceptable, place a number in the box next to each one indicating the order in which you would consider using it. You need not choose more than one approach. Write a zero in the box for any approach you do not consider acceptable.

(a) I would explain to students that vocabulary words are labels for concepts that are interrelated and build upon each other. ?

(b) I would ask questions about various vocabulary words in the passage and lead them to understand the meaning of those words. ?

(c) I would ask students to look up each vocabulary word in the glossary or dictionary and use it in a sentence. ?

(d) I would ask students to rewrite the passage using words that made sense to them. ?

(e) I would demonstrate how the meaning of the vocabulary words is important in other contexts. ?

(f) I would have students discuss what they think the meaning of each of the words is and why. ?

(g) Which of the approaches listed above do you believe to be the least acceptable approach? *(Place the letter a-g of that approach in the box at right...)* ?

Reading Scenario 2

Students have been asked to discuss the main points of a passage about a social studies topic. Most of the students in class appear to be having difficulty with this task. When asked how they identify main points, students said they look in the first and last paragraphs of the passage.

If you were working with a class in which many students were having the same difficulties as the students in the class above and if there were no time constraints on what you might do in responding to this, what approach or sequence of approaches do you believe would best help students learn?

Below, place a "1" in the box next to the approach you believe to be the best. If you believe other approaches would also be acceptable, place a number in the box next to each one indicating the order in which you would consider using it. You need not choose more than one approach. Write a zero in the box for any approach you do not consider acceptable.

(a) I would give students an accurate explanation of the meaning of the main points of the passage. ?

(b) I would ask the class questions that lead them to understand the main points of the passage. ?

(c) I would give students a series of activities designed to help them identify the main points of the passage ?

(d) I would give students my interpretation of the main points and ask them to find evidence to support or refute my interpretation. ?

(e) I would point students to relevant parts of the passage. ?

(f) I would have students discuss what they learned from the passage and wait for the main points to emerge in the discussion. ?

(g) Which of the approaches listed above do you believe to be the least acceptable approach? (Place the letter a-g of that approach in the box) ?

Teaching Process

Think of the last reading/ILA/humanities lesson you taught to your class. (If this lesson was atypical, e.g., an examination or a field trip, pick the previous one)

19. Which subjects were involved in the lesson?

- ❒ **Mathematics**
- ❒ **Reading**
- ❒ **Science**
- ❒ **History**
- ❒ **Social Science**
- ❒ **Art/music**
- ❒ **Other**

20. How many minutes was the lesson? *Please write in a number:* _____*minutes*

21. Was this lesson...?

Check one box in each row

	Yes	No	
(a) the introduction of this topic	❒	❒	
(b) a continuation of a previous lesson on the same topic		❒	❒
(c) the end of the coverage of this topic	❒	❒	

NOTE: Think of the same class lesson.

22. How did this lesson proceed?

The following presents a list of activities that may occur during a lesson. Although the list is not exhaustive of what happens in a classroom, most classroom activities may be considered as variations of those listed below. Using this list, indicate how your lesson developed. in the blanks on the right, write in the order in which the activities used in the lesson took place (1=first, 2=second, and so on) and estimate the amount of time you spent on each one. Ignore activities you used that do not fit into the descriptions listed. Write in the order and the approximate number of minutes for each activity. NOTE: If you did not do a certain activity write zero in the blank next to it.

	order	minutes
(a) review of previous lesson(s)	_____	_____
(b) a short quiz or test to review previous lesson	_____	_____
(b) oral recitation or drill (students reading or responding aloud)	_____	_____
(c) review or correction of previous lesson's homework	_____	_____
(d) **introduction** of a topic (class discussion, teacher explanation/demonstration, film, video, use of concrete materials, etc.)	_____	_____
(e) **development** of a topic (class discussion, teacher explanation/demonstration, group work, film, video, etc.)	_____	_____
(f) small group activities (with or without teacher)	_____	_____
(g) students do paper-and-pencil exercises related to topic (not the same as homework)	_____	_____
(h) assignment of student homework	_____	_____
(i) students work on homework in class	_____	_____
(j) extended writing activities related to reading or conducting research on a topic.	_____	_____
(k) silent reading	_____	_____

23. In this lesson, how often do you usually ask students to do each of the following?

	Check one box in each row. never almost never	some lessons	most lessons	every lesson
a) explain the reasoning behind an idea	❒	❒	❒	❒
b) represent and analyze relationships with tables, charts, graphs	❒	❒	❒	❒
c) work on questions for which there are no immediately obvious answers	❒	❒	❒	❒
d) use computers	❒	❒	❒	❒
e) write	❒	❒	❒	❒
f) practice reading skills and strategies	❒	❒	❒	❒

24. How often do students....

	Check one box in each row. Almost never	Never/ some lessons	most lessons	every lesson
a. work individually without assistance from the teacher	❒	❒	❒	❒
b. work individually with assistance from the teacher	❒	❒	❒	❒
c. work together as a class with the teacher teaching the whole class	❒	❒	❒	❒
d. work together as a class with students responding to one another	❒	❒	❒	❒
e. work in pairs or small groups without assistance from the teacher	❒	❒	❒	❒
f. work in pairs or small groups with assistance from the teacher	❒	❒	❒	❒

25. How often do you usually assign homework?

	Check one box
(a) never	❒
(b) less than once a week	❒
(c) once or twice a week	❒
(d) 3 or 4 times a week	❒
(e) everyday	❒

26. If you assign homework, how often do you assign each of the following kinds of tasks?

Check one box in each row.

	never	rarely	some-times	always	I don't give home work
a. worksheets or workbook	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
b. problem/question sets in textbook	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
c. reading in a textbook or supplementary materials	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
d. writing definitions or other short writing assignment	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
e. small investigation(s) or gathering data	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
f. working individually on long term projects or experiments	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
g. working as a small group on long term projects or experiments	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
h. finding one or more uses of the content covered	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
i. preparing oral reports either individually or as a small group	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒
j. keeping a journal	❒	❒	❒	❒	❒

27. In your lessons, how often do you divide the class into any of the following types of groups?

	never or almost never	some lessons	most lesson	every lesson
a. age groups	❒	❒	❒	❒
b. ability groups	❒	❒	❒	❒
c. interest groups	❒	❒	❒	❒
d. grouped for disciplinary reasons	❒	❒	❒	❒
e. grouped to reduce class size	❒	❒	❒	❒
f. Other (*please specify*)_____	❒	❒	❒	❒

28. Excluding any team teaching partners, how often do you visit another teacher's classroom to observe their teaching?

(a) Never ❒
(b) Annually ❒
(c) Semi-annually ❒
(d) Bimonthly ❒
(e) Monthly ❒
(f) Weekly ❒
(g) More than once a week ❒

29. Excluding any team teaching partners, how often does another teacher visit your classroom to observe your teaching?

Check one box only.

(a) Never ❒
(b) Annually ❒
(c) Semi-annually ❒
(d) Bimonthly ❒
(e) Monthly ❒
(f) Weekly ❒
(g) More than once a week ❒

Reading Topics

30. Is reading taught mainly as a separate subject (i.e., not integrated with other subjects) to your class?

Check one box

Yes ❒ No ❒

a. If YES
how many minutes per week is reading taught to your class?

Please write in a number.

_____ minutes

b. If NO
please estimate on average about how many minutes per week are spent on reading related instruction.

Please write in a number.

_____ minutes

The purpose of the next two pages of this questionnaire is to obtain a description of the content you cover in your class. You are asked to provide only one piece of information. That is, to put a check inside the box indicating the amount of time you estimate you will have spent on content this year.

Be sure to consider each type of content on the list; the content you cover in your course may be spread across many different parts of the list.

Reading Strategies and Skills

Strategies and Skills	Amount of Time Taught			
	Not taught	< 4 hrs.	4-20 hrs.	20+ hrs.
31. General Skills and Strategies of the Reading Process				
(a) making predictions based on text				
(b) decoding unknown words using context clues				
(c) using a glossary and dictionary				
(d) adjusting reading speed to suit purpose and material				
(e) determining the purpose of persuasive text				
(f) decoding words using phonetic & structural analysis, syntactic structures, and semantic context				
(g) monitoring text confusion				
(h) representing concrete information as explicit mental pictures				
(i) asking questions during reading				
(j) reflecting on learning after reading				
(k) specific devices used for persuasion				
(l) specific strategies for clearing up text confusions				
(m) relating specific interests to selection of materials				
(n) texts from the perspective in which they were written				
(o) author's purpose				
(p) author's point of view				
32. General Skills and Strategies for Reading Literature				
(a) using literature to better understand actions of others				
(b) main and subordinate characters				
(c) relationship of events and characters to real life people and situations				
(d) dialogues and how they relate to stories				
(e) share responses to literature with peers				
(f) making inferences regarding character motivation				
(g) elements of plot (conflict, resolution, goal)				
(h) the use of literary devices				
(i) personal response to a text				
(j) internal/external conflicts between main and subordinate characters				
(k) the stylistic effect of complex dialogues on a story				
(l) abstract connections between one's own life and characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict				
(m) main ideas using section headings, topic sentences, and summary sentences				
(n) uses of parts of book (index, table of contents, glossary, appendix)				
(o) author's purpose				
(p) author's point of view				
(q) simple hierarchic structures in texts (e.g., one				
(r) persuasive text				
(s) commonly used technical terms in informational texts				
(t) purposes for reading, including to answer a specific question, to form an opinion, to skim for facts				
(u) Implied generalizations and supporting evidence in text				
(v) information as new knowledge				
(x) information-organizing strategies that are personally useful				
(y) how peer discussions promote understanding information				
(z) mathematical notations presented in writing				

Strategies and Skills	Amount of Time Taught			
	Not taught	< 4 hrs.	4-20 hrs.	20+ hrs.
33. Uses Different Information Sources to Accomplish Specific Tasks				
(a) directions or procedures				
(b) political and social messages of cartoons				
(c) schedules (bus routes, catalogues)				
(d) information in a data matrix				
(e) basic linear paths in organizational charts				
(f) major sections in schematic diagrams				
(g) symbols in a flowchart				
34. General Skills and Strategies of the Writing Process				
(a) writing stories or essays based on personal experience				
(b) seeking help from others to improve writing				
(c) writing stories or essays appropriate for audience				
(d) writing expository pieces				
(e) writing persuasive pieces				
(f) writing essays that include cause and effect				
(g) writing expressive pieces				
(h) writing autobiographies				
(i) writing narrative pieces				
(j) revising content of own writing				
(k) drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading written work				
(l) writes for public and private audiences				
(m) writing biographical sketches				
(n) writing for different purposes				
(o) writing for different audiences				
(p) writing descriptive essays				
(q) writing fictional and reflective essays				
(r) strong sense of cohesion in writing				
(s) clear personal style and voice in writing				
(t) personal strengths and weaknesses				
35. Stylistic and Rhetorical Aspects of Writing				
(a) use of descriptive language to enhance and clarify ideas				
(b) use of explicit transitional devices				
(c) need for a variety of sentence structures and lengths				
(d) variety of techniques for providing supportive detail				
(e) vocabulary that stimulates the reader				
(f) effective use of technical terms and notations in writing				
36. Grammatical and Mechanical Conventions				
(a) complete sentences				
(b) proper use of nouns				
(c) proper use of adverbial forms				
(d) proper use of pronouns				
(e) proper use of coordinating conjunctions				
(f) correctly spelling high frequency words				
(g) use of appropriate punctuation				
(h) appropriate capitalization				
(i) vocabulary that stimulates the reader				
(j) effective use of technical terms and notations in writing				

Classroom Observation Protocol

Instructions to the Observer: The focus of each observation is a reading activity or lesson.

Before the observation

- Know what the lesson is about that you are going to observe.
- Ask for copies of lesson plans, student work, etc.

During the Observation

- Provide as vivid a description as possible of the lesson, answering each question with the description section.
- Provide running observation notes.

After the Observation

- Ask teacher any questions necessary to clarify your notes.
- Summarize your notes

Provide a description of the specifics of the learning activity or lesson and the instructional environment:

Who?

- Teacher
- Grade
- Number of students (describe groupings, if any)
- Number of adults

What?

- Learning activity
- Subject/Theme

When?

- Date
- Time span

Where?

- School
- Learning space

How?

- Resources (Computers, video, audio/voice, black/white boards, other (e.g., overhead, reference books, software, maps/globes, wall displays)
- Materials

APPENDIX B

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